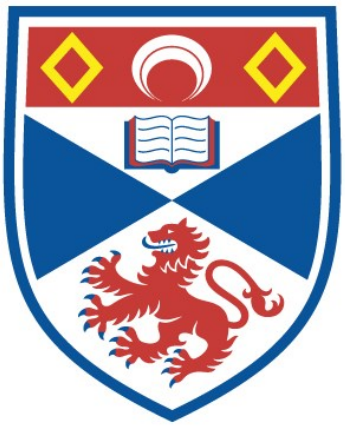
THE ART OF ARTHUR BOYD

Janet McKenzie Spens

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



2002

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PhD Submission History of Art
University of St Andrews.

April 2002

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ABSTRACT
The Art of Arthur Boyd

Arthur Boyd (1920-1999) presents art historians with an exceptionally complex critical dimension in terms of his position in twentieth century painting. Although he is considered to be one of the most distinguished Australian painters of the century, in terms of the originality and accomplishment exhibited over five decades (the other being Sir Sidney Nolan O.M,.R.A.), Boyd has been, to date, ill-served by contemporary historians. The earlier definitive publication, by Franz Philipp was published in London as early as 1967. There was subsequently a relatively brief study by Dr Ursula Hoff (1986). In both cases the research was valuable, given the social and cultural climate of each respective period, but their conclusions demand revision in the present perspective.

Boyd's completed *oeuvre* is now open to revisionary analysis in art historical terms, in the light of evolving and more demanding criteria with respect to a properly contemporary social and cultural perspective. My work was in large part complete by 1996, after which the artist suffered terminally from a physically and mentally debilitating condition ; he died three years later. In a radical reappraisal I have accordingly reviewed the chronological progression of his work in various media. This is charted and analysed in terms of its transition from the relatively benign landscape and figurative subject material in the prewar period , then following the trauma of world war a transformation into a more psychologically riven genre of allegorical departures from harmony and visual cohesion: to work driven by global knowledge of atrocity and deprivation.

As the postwar work developed, the artist's imagery reflected a deliberate level of appropriation of subject and composition. An awareness of European narrative painting grew at first hand, deployed by him subsequently to develop content via specific collaborations in graphic work, with established scholars and poets. In the 1960s and 1970s Boyd successfully evolved, with his exceptional technical proficiency and draughtmanship, a model whereby religious or historical narrative text was combined with an expanding repertoire of Boyd imagery. I have explored this process and its results to find an original connectivity not previously evaluated. This examines the development of the *oeuvre* as between thematic content and its expression through Boyd's personal language in painting. Of particular significance I have reappraised Boyd's Bride paintings of the 1950s in the light of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report , *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, (1997). In doing so Boyd can be seen as both a courageous and a highly original artist who sought to expose the ills of society through painting. At the same time his work is the product of the ignorance of white Australians in their comprehension of the plight of Australia's dispossessed Indigenous race. These social aspects are here exposed for the first time in my conclusions as essential to the complete reappraisal of Arthur Boyd's ultimate standing in terms of present day critique.

Janet McKenzie
April 2002.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

(1) Arthur Boyd: An Overview

The most vital and significant work of Arthur Boyd seeks to define the human predicament through images inspired by Biblical stories, literature and Classical mythology. Boyd's *oeuvre* contains works on many levels, in a wide variety of media, subject matter and style. It is, however, in his allegorical works that focus on the figure in the landscape, unexpectedly lodged within the tradition of history painting, that Boyd reaches his significant status in the context of twentiethcentury art.

The purpose of a critical appraisal of Boyd's work is to define for the sake of posterity the universal importance of Boyd as an artist. This necessitates an evaluation of his best works and a distinction made between these and minor works. Like Picasso's, Boyd's *oeuvre* is vast, and it would be wrong to assume that all works are of equal value. Boyd himself perceives a hierarchy in art and within his own work. At certain important stages in his development as an artist his spirit has been recharged and his inspiration renewed by pure landscape painting, especially during his adolescence and also in the 1970s in the Shoalhaven area of New South Wales. He acquired confidence as an artist through portraiture and figure studies, especially those in pastel and printmaking that have enabled the allegorical paintings to be developed. It was the European tradition of story-telling through painting that drew Boyd and sustained him as an artist, prompting his exploration in both formal and conceptual terms. From early reproductions of Brueghel and Bosch from the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, as a young man, to visits to the National Gallery in London to see works by Titian, Sassetta, Cézanne and the museums on the Continent, it is the European cultural tradition that gave Boyd the conceptual framework for his work. Like many artists of significance historically Boyd interweaves personal experiences with contemporary messages inside the framework thus established.[1] *The Expulsion* (1947-8),[2] for example, takes place in the Australian bush, and Narcissus[3] gazes into a pool near the Shoalhaven

Riverin New South Wales. An appreciationof the role of Allegory and Myth in the art of Arthur Boyd is therefore central to the assessment of his position in art historical terms. His contribution as an artist can be categorised in many ways. In the context of this dissertation I am particularly concerned with the meaning of his work and with the process that leads to the creation of works that have great significance within Australian culture and also in broader cultural terms. That is not to say, however, that it is not necessary to examine his technical achievementand to explore the extent to which this inventivenessof techniquehas been tested out by him through a wide varietyof media.

Arthur Boyd grew up in the tradition of impressionist outdoor painting from nature.[4] He explored this from his home in the outer Melbourne suburb of Murrumbeena in the surrounding countryside there. At the age of fourteen he left school. Two years later he went to live with his grandfather (following the death of his grandmother,Emma Minnie Boyd) in Rosebud, on the Mornington Peninsula also near Melbourne.[5] Arthur Boyd's family maintained a strong oral tradition (daily readings from the Bible,for example) and retained a very great respect for the literatureand letters of European culture.[6] The previous generation of Boyd's family had been privileged to travel regularly between Australia and Europe. Their access to European cultural life established both enthusiasm and longing. Although the Boyd family of Arthur's childhood knew extreme financial hardship, there was a background of wealth and status on both sides of the family. The patrician style of living and the cultural *milieu* to which both the Boyd and A'Beckett families belong is described by Brenda Niall in her excellent biography of Arthur's uncle, the novelist Martin Boyd.[7] Martin Boyd's autobiographical novels, *A Single Flame* (London, 1939) and *Day of My Delight* (Melbourne, 1965), revealthe background to some extent for Arthur Boyd's own artistic and cultural aspirations.[8]

Boyd's immediatefamily was also deeply religious. In practice this meant that his father's Christian Scientist views imposed a heightened respect for all living things with the belief that a harmonious relationship between people and the natural world is possible. The combination of a spiritual worldview and an unorthodox upbringing, in

addition to a patrician expectation of participating in the appreciation of music, literature and the arts, gave Arthur Boyd a sense of confidence from a very young age that he would become an artist. It was a natural development of his creative upbringing. The sense of vocation and confidence in the eventual importance of his contribution as an artist and the positive encouragement from his family resulted in Boyd producing precocious and accomplished landscape painting as a young man still in his teens.[9] From the mid-1930s Boyd had increased contact with other artists and friends at the University of Melbourne (Peter Herbst and Max Nicholson in particular) who visited Murrumbeena, and he responded quickly to a wide range of stimuli. Of particular importance here were the portrait paintings inspired by the psychological tensions depicted in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, which he read in 1938. The Russian novelist's work was introduced by Max Nicholson, who became a close friend of Arthur Boyd and of his family. He and Doris Boyd (Arthur Boyd's mother) both read aloud and discussed literature. Doris Boyd was privately a writer, though did not actually publish her stories, and she enjoyed discussions of a literary kind concerning moral and spiritual questions. She also enjoyed discussing her son's paintings, often giving them titles and speculating on their meaning.[10] Boyd's paintings of the sixties, following her death (*The Potter* series **2.33, 2.34**), are a testament to the important role she played in his creative development.

During the war Boyd's talent for appropriating ideas and styles is most evident. In 1935 he first encountered the work of Van Gogh in post-card reproductions sold by Gino Nibbi at the Leonardo art shop in Melbourne. He also saw in reproduction *The Tempest* by Oskar Kokoshka at this time (1935). Following his visit to the Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art in Melbourne he painted in his mother's bedroom a frieze of horses inspired by Franz Marc.[11] In contrast to the impressionistic works produced as an adolescent living on the Mornington Peninsula, Boyd explored the psychological potential of the landscape: loneliness and the primordial aspects of the Australian landscape assume significance, forming the backdrop for the allegorical dramas produced by Boyd during the 1940s. The

psychological portraits such as *Barbara Hockey* (1938) (**2.27**), and *Three Heads* (1938) (**2.28**) display Boyd's passionate approach but also a crude technique of a virtually self-taught artist. Boyd chose in preference to an art school training, a more independent path inspired by books and friends, a path that he in fact continued to pursue for most of his working life.[12] In 1943 fellow painter Albert Tucker introduced Boyd to traditional painting methods through Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting* (1st English edition, 1934), a book that was shared by other artists who were working in Melbourne during the war years.[13] A shortage of materials limited Boyd and his contemporaries and prompted them to explore alternative media such as coal tar derivatives. Tucker was able to procure supplies from the chemical company ICI. *I Shot the Albatross* (1945), is painted with coal tar paint on muslin stretched over special thick cardboard, which was an adaptation of Doerner's methods. The shortage of orthodox materials prompted an experimental approach to painting which Boyd enjoyed well beyond the war. Doerner states that in addition to linen fabrics "there are many other fabrics suitable for sizing and priming, provided they are sufficiently strong and closely enough woven".[14] The muslin used by Arthur Boyd was not closely woven which no doubt prompted the use of a board instead of a canvas stretcher.

Allegorical paintings required greater technical proficiency - in terms of the spatial organisation (figures in the landscape) and knowledge of art-historical precedents - than the young Boyd had. The discussions that took place at his family home also prompted him to look to art of the past for inspiration and in this he received a great deal of encouragement from members of his family and close friends. Information about the war in Europe was brought to Australia on newsreels. The arrival of refugees with first-hand knowledge confirmed to Australians the appalling documentation. The Polish painter Yosl Bergner arrived in 1938. He became involved in the art world in Melbourne and was able to convey to intellectuals and artists the horrors of the war and the shocking treatment of Jews in concentration camps. Arthur Boyd turned to the work of the Old Masters found in reproduction in the State Library in Melbourne. He was

particularly drawn to the paintings of Bosch and Breughel and to Rembrandt. Ursula Hoff stated that Breughel's influence allowed Boyd "to represent the primitive passions inspiring the horrors of war-time concentration camps with a detachment which is the mark of his sensitivity".[15] Although the war at home was worrying and temporarily inconvenient, it was for a nineteen-year-old in a cartographic unit in Melbourne a relatively mild 'military' experience by any standards of the time. It does indicate that Boyd had a great capacity to identify with the plight of others for he produced dramatic and heartfelt work without first-hand experience. His conscription into the army in 1941 was obviously a shock to the sensitive young man; two months' training as a machine gunner, for an individual whose father was inspired by a religious zeal which imbued him with a heightened respect for all living creatures, was a terrible shock. Arthur's father, Merric Boyd, brought his children up never to hurt any creature, to the point that spiders and ants were carefully removed from the house to safety. The war was an appalling business; the young artist felt compelled to comment on it; his expression is prompted by a personal revulsion but it goes beyond a purely subjective statement. As early as 1938 and 1939 there are examples of work by Boyd (aged 19 and 20) that show his desire to make art with a universal appeal, and he did so by aspiring to the structures of classical imagery. By contrast to the detached nature of the Biblical, war-time paintings, *The Bride* series (1957-9) **(4.35-4.44)**, has a frontality not only by reference to Chagall's compositions, in technical terms, but also the closeness of one who has observed in person the appalling conditions under which many Australian Aborigines on the fringes of white settlement lived, in a trip made to Central Australia.[16] Boyd's wartime paintings elevated the Australian experience into a universal experience by the juxtaposition of Judaeo-Christian themes (for example, *The Expulsion*, *Mammon*) against an Australian landscape, but they retain the distance or detachment that one finds in history paintings of Biblical or Classical myths. The drama and grotesque nature of the imagery in paintings such as *Melbourne Burning* (1946-7), **(4.10)** testify to the young artist's indignation at the horror of war and fear that Australia might not remain safely out of conflict. It may be too, that they were tinged by a sense of guilt that as a

young man he was away from front-line combat, that although the war upset an idyllic adolescence,he did not endure the hellish experience of Jews in concentration camps or fellow Australians being killed in combat.

The war years represented a coming of age for Boyd as an individual as well as the maturing of his vision in wanting to imbue his works with imagination,so that they would convey universally recognisable meaning. He also began to conceive of himself as an artist of importance, which gave him the courage to tackle more complex and independent projects.

The war years in Australia emphasised the isolation of the country from the European tradition that formed the basis of its culture because normal travel was impossible. The tyranny of distance has always played an important role in the way in which Australians have perceived themselves. In cultural terms, Australian art has traditionally been discussed in terms of how it relates to European movements and precedents.[17] During the war artists had only limited access to travel, books and reproductions from abroad and so they were thrown upon their own resources. What resulted is what Richard Haese documented in *Rebels and Precursors* (1981), as a period of unprecedented activity in the arts and of the production of some of the finest paintings in Australian art history.[18] Arthur Boyd was removed from the overtly political activity that took place over the role of art in wartime (the debate in the Magazine *Angry Penguins* between different factions of the Contemporary Art Society over the role of the artist in the Anti-Fascist movement,for example[19]) because he was by nature shy and because he worked best in the supportive and creative home life at Murrumbeena.

Of importance in the assessment of Boyd's significance as an artist is the fact that he was at once concerned with the Australian Experience (see The Antipodean Manifesto[20]) and belonging to a wider cultural tradition, especially its history of art. It was the fusion of these two aspects of his heritage that became apparent in his early twenties in Melbourne and that coloured his life as an artist. His desire to travel in Europe was not unique; most artists in Australia want to experience art in Europe first-hand, but his family's ability to go between Australia and Europe gave him a sense of

confidence that he belonged in either or both places. His own subsequent travel between England and Australia due to the extraordinary success of his work enriched his imagery and provided constant stimulus.

Boyd made an advantage of the fact that his family life was unorthodox and creative and that there was a precedent for living both in Europe and Australia. It put him in a better position to comment on cultural issues. Boyd first travelled to London in 1961 and subsequently stayed on. He lived first in Highgate and then moved to a remote part of Suffolk. He travelled regularly to the Continent during the thirty years based in England, and made several trips to Australia, where he acquired a property in 1972. He owned a house in Tuscany (between Pisa and Florence) from the late 1970s until his death. In spite of a somewhat nomadic life between England, Italy and Australia, Boyd worked intensively in Australia and has never relinquished the Australian landscape as the backdrop for his important paintings. Boyd's Suffolk landscapes are less compelling than the Australian landscapes. In Italy Boyd felt greatly inspired by the Medieval and Renaissance paintings so freely accessible. He had a great love of the Italian landscape but felt less free to be original or successful in any attempt to paint there from nature as there were in his view so many "exquisite landscapes in the history of Italian painting, especially in the Renaissance".[21] The mythology that has been created around the life of St. Francis of Assisi, on the other hand, so captured Boyd's imagination that he made dozens of pastel paintings and lithographs on the stories surrounding the life of the Saint and he did so in a wholly original and brilliant manner.

Boyd felt a powerful affinity for the land and the bush in Australia; he never tired of the beauty and the miracle of nature there. His return to Australia in 1972, to the dramatic landscape of the Shoalhaven River of New South Wales (as opposed to the subtler Victorian landscape that he painted as a young man), recharged these feelings and precipitated a prolific and creative twenty-five years of painting, during which a large percentage of works were actually executed in his Suffolk studio. Colour, which is vital to Boyd's painting grew out of the strong, clear light of Australia and gives him a more

dramatic repertoire of images which he used to present poignant messages about the future of the environmentfor example,and the folly of the arms race.

The critical success of Boyd's work dates back to the 1940s and 1950s in Melbourne where his talent could not go unnoticed; no artist in Australia had conceived of such a fusion of European and Australian themes in an allegorical manner. With *The Bride* series (1957-9), his work received critical attention (Bernard Smith and Alan McCulloch) though the paintings also shocked conservative sectors of the art world. When Boyd moved to London in 1961 he took *The Bride* paintings with him. They were, soon after his arrival,exhibited at Zwemmers Gallery where they proved to be a *tour de force.* Critical attention reached new heights during the sixties in London with regular reviews of exhibitions in newspapers and journals. The first retrospective of Boyd's work was held at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 1962, which received an extraordinary press coverage in both Britain and Australia. It seemed to commentators in Britain, for example Bryan Robertson, that probably only in a new culture such as Australia's was a strong and unspoiled imagery possible. Boyd's work appealed to those whose cultural roots belonged in Expressionism and to whom recognisable images were considered important. His success was in part a reaction to the well-orchestrated supremacy of Abstraction and of Pop Art. Later,in the 1980s, Boyd was an obvious choice for the influential art critic Peter Fuller, who championed a return of figuration to art. The layers of meaning in Boyd's work, and Boyd's predilection for allegory and myth appealed greatly to him. In addition, Fuller had visited Australia in 1982 and like so many visitors was overwhelmed by the scale, the light and the artistic activity that was taking place there. Fuller and Boyd became close friends and according to Boyd, Fuller exerted considerable influence on his work. Regrettably Fuller died without writing his intended study of Boyd's work and to date there are no works by Boyd in the Tate Gallery, a fact that is considered by protagonists of Boyd to be a major omission in the collection.

The 1990s saw a surge of interest in Boyd's work in Australia prompted by Boyd's gift of his properties on the Shoalhaven in New South Wales to the people of

Australia. It is intended to be an artistic centre, the first of its kind in the country. The Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1993 mounted the first major retrospective of Boyd's work in Australia for thirty years. It was no doubt obvious to Boyd at an early stage in his career that financial success gave him the freedom to lead the peripatetic life that suited his method of working and ensured that he was never without new and inspiring ideas. By distancing himself from his home country, Boyd has been able to make poignant observations about the mythology of Australia whilst at the same time creating images of a universal nature.

The artistic career of Arthur Boyd spans over fifty years and he undoubtedly emerges as Australia's greatest artist and a painter of international significance. The subject of this study is to assess his contribution and the lasting relevance of his work.

ENDNOTES

1 History painting and Boyd's relationship to it will be explored in Part III, Word and Image.

2 *The Expulsion* (1947-8) will be discussed in Chapter Two.

3 Narcissus inspired Boyd in the 1970s and 1980s to produce many paintings on the Classical subject. The theme was amplified in a collaborative project with poet Peter Porter. Boyd produced a suite of 25 etchings to accompany Porter's poetry. They were published in a limited edition book in 1984 by Secker and Warburg, London.

4 Ursula Hoff, "The Paintings of Arthur Boyd", *Meanjin*, Vol XVII, no.2, June 1958, Melbourne p.16.

5 September 1936, death of Emma Minnie Boyd. Boyd's grandfather, Arthur Merric Boyd sold the house in Sandringham (suburb of Melbourne) and moved into a family cottage at Rosebud and invited Arthur, aged 16, to join him. He stayed there

approximatelythree years. Details of his painting there will be discussed in Chapter Two.

6 Arthur Boyd interview with Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1990, p. 22.

7 Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988.

8 Martin Boyd, *A Single Flame*, London, Dent, 1939; *Day of My Delight: An Anglo-Australian Memoir*, Melbourne, Lansdowne, 1965.

9 Interviewwith Anne Purves, Director of Australian Galleries, Melbourne and dealer for Arthur Boyd for over forty years. Mrs. Purves maintained that although Arthur Boyd was by nature self-deprecating that from a young age never doubted his talent and his importanceas an artist.

10 For example, the painting of escapees from a nearby asylum appealed to Doris Boyd.

11 Barry Pearce, *Arthur Boyd, retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1994, p.182.

12 This point is expanded in Chapter Three.

13 Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting. With notes on the techniques of the Old Masters*, George G. Harrap and Co., London, 1949.

14 *Ibid.*, p.6.

15 Ursula Hoff, *op.cit.*, p.16.

16 Chapters Two and Three expand this.

17 See Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, A Study in the History of Art and Ideas*, Clarendon Press, Melboune 1960.

18 Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors, The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Allen Lane (Penguin Books), Melbourne, 1981.

19 I wrote an account of this debate in my monograph on Noel Counihan, an artist contemporary of Arthur Boyd's. It will be discussed in Chapter Three. Janet McKenzie, *Noel Counihan*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1986.

20 In response to *avant-garde* painting in the 1950s in Australia a group of seven artists (Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Bob Dickerson (the only Sydney painter), John Perceval and Clifton Pugh), called the Antipodeans was formed. Bernard Smith, also a signatory described it in *Australian Painting, 1788-1970*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1971, p. 328.

> The formation of the group was a reaction not so much against abstract art as one of the long-proven forms of contemporary expression as against the clamorous pretensions of the multitude of new converts to abstract expressionism and its varieties then rising upon all sides. The manifesto which the Antipodeans published in the catalogue of their exhibition, held at the Victorian Artists' Society rooms in August 1959, is best understood as a formal protest against the mass conversion to abstract expressionism of artists and critics.

In the context of a study of Arthur Boyd's art the Antipodeans' attitude to myth is important. Smith states, "Their attitude to myth has been much misunderstood". The Antipodean Manifesto asserted ". . . the right of the artist not to invent myths of his own but rather to make use of myth in a creative way". From the Manifesto:

> In the growth and transformation of its myths a society achieves its own sense of identity. In this process the artist may play a creative and liberating role. The ways in which a society images its own feelings and attitudes in myth provides him with one of the deepest sources of art.
>
> *Ibid.*, p. 329.

In 1993, in a speech to launch the Clifton Pugh Collection at the Latrobe University Gallery, Professor Bernard Smith responded to the 'embarrassment' caused for the artists who signed the Antipodean Manifesto by stating.

> Art writing in Australia will still have to learn how to read the Antipodean Manifesto. It is not at bottom an attack on abstract art, it is an attack on the instrument. None of the signatures of the Manifesto were of the view that abstract art had no place to play on the Australian art scene.

Clifton Pugh and the Antipodeans, Melbourne, 14 November 1993.

In 1988 a reconstruction of the 1959 Antipodean exhibition was put together which was shown in Melbourne (Lauraine Diggins Fine Art), Canberra (Nolan Gallery, Lanyon) and Sydney (SH Ervin Gallery) 1988-89. Arthur Boyd wrote the Introduction: The Antipodeans: Another Chapter.

> At the time we felt we could be swamped by American abstractionism. Such work has its place and there should be no limits to the creative process. But, if we only see elegant blots and they are called something other than this, pretentiousness might be our downfall. It seems there is little connection between the art books and images of the 1950s and the 1980s. Art has undergone much change, to the extent that the younger painters' assessment of our efforts may be to simply dismiss then as paltry or meaningless. There were painters at the time who were asked to join us but they declined, perhaps in fear that such an involvement could half their progress. I suggest that the committed artist will follow his passions and convictions and may learn from the consequent misadventures that may befall him. The fear of making a mistake is of greater risk to his abilities that the mistake could ever be ... I make no apology for my involvement with the Antipodeans. From my point of view, they were no aberrant moment.

See also Bernard Smith, "The Truth about the Antipodeans", *Parxis M # 8, The West Australian Journal of Contemporary Art*, Autumn 1985, pp. 4-9.

21 Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1992.

INTRODUCTION

(2) The Artistic Biography

The prime vehicle for the study of the Australian artist Arthur Boyd (1920-1999) is the artistic biography. A true understanding of the work of Boyd with its unique fusion of autobiography with historical references to the old masters can only be achieved through this approach. Throughout his career spanning sixty years he appropriately maintained just such an inspired dialogue with the work of Breughel, Bosch, Rembrandt, Titian, Piero di Cosimo as well as Chagall and Cézanne at specific points. Initially, as a young artist, prior to the Second World War, his paintings are seen to be primarily of family and friends supplemented by "Impressionist" landscapes near and around Melbourne.

Later, the dislocation caused by the war and his increased knowledge of the European holocaust prompted Boyd to choose a language that had a more universal appeal. Then, while he produced paintings of such unprecedented drama and originality in Australia, by imposing Biblical stories onto the Australian landscape, it was the fusion of distressing and poignant images from his own personal life, in his poverty stricken childhood and the anguish and tension caused by his father's epilepsy that resonated: that set these remarkable paintings far apart from those of fellow artists and in doing so also offered a deep psychological insight yet a ready contemporaneity within the European tradition of history painting.

It can be seen that Arthur Boyd's personality is central to his work, in that his painting and drawing become often a cathartic means of confronting various tensions and traumas in his life both a child and young man. Yet in all of his work there is a sincerity and conviction that places him firmly in the modernist tradition. At times this involvement is physical and frenzied as in the *Nebuchadnezzar* series **(7.15-7.26)** of the 1960s or the *Caged Painter* works of 1972 **(8.2)**, where the paint is squeezed directly from large tubes or smeared dramatically by hand onto the canvas. Therefore

it is not by definition, possible to provide a convincing account of Boyd's imagery as an artist without exploring this personal iconography. Furthermore, the recurrent nature of certain images is secure evidence of their sustained significance. For example, images of cripples in the 1940s can be attributed to Boyd sourcing the work of Breughel in art historical terms, but the choice of the particular image was actually prompted by the victims of war who so distressed him on the streets of South Melbourne. In addition, polio victims (such as the artist John Perceval and his friend Carl Cooper) became the subjects for his paintings. Cripples, in turn came to symbolize suffering, the cruelty of chance and guilt. The prostrated figure that occurs in numerous paintings was itself directly inspired by Breughel's *Land of Cockaigne*,1567, **(10.8)** but is given a poignancy in its representation in autobiography as directly alluding to his father's outstretched figure, lying on the side of the road following an epileptic fit. His father's recurrent epilepsy thus had a profound effect on Boyd's childhood. As the eldest child it was he who would often be informed by neighbours that his father was lying unconscious on the road. The embarrassment, anguish and guilt thus compounded, had a profound effect on the psychological development of Arthur Boyd himself. So he expunged these feelings in his paintings. And when he came to read Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*, he personally identified with the central character who, like the author himself, suffered from epilepsy. By making references to the work of artists from the European tradition, Boyd effectively came to condone the use of autobiography in art. But, as the extent of the atrocities of the European holocaust was known in Australia, Boyd became determined that his art should not be limited to his own personal reactions but seek the appeal of a wider audience.

In general, Boyd's creative development is characterized by a highly original interpretation of the narrative tradition. In the Bible and later in classical mythology and poetry, Boyd selects themes and stories that interest him yet have poignancy for contemporary society. These are often allegories, that address human fallibility in its many forms as a deep personal response to contemporary issues: the European war,

the global arms race and continuing environmental issues: so Boyd became a visionary of all our futures.

This thesis is therefore structured as an artist biography in chronological order. My primary concern has been the location of accurate sources for the work produced, whether it be art historical, literary, autobiographical or social in dimension. The work so produced at each stage of this life, then comes to determine the art historical approach at every point, so that for example, the paintings produced during the war call for a specific analysis of his childhood and of the traumas he had experienced; and of how these affected his reactions to the advent of war (his parents held Christian Scientist views: his own response to illness is equally relevant, as that to both emotional tensions and to personal sexual anxieties). By the end of the Second World War Boyd had then experienced a personal crisis in terms of his own art; to assuage this, and to represent its true dimension, he chose the structure of the paintings of Breughel and then the allegories of the Old Testament. Ultimately, these paintings produced in 1946-47 are among the most unique and original works of art to be produced in Australia.

Any discussions of them must therefore take into consideration many issues the artist's *persona*, his obsessive approach to art and his personal need in the face of moral outrage to transfer his imagery to one which had a wide appeal. In addition, an exact iconographic analysis is required of the works themselves to determine the working method that was to set him up for a lifelong dialogue with art of the past. In the Biblical paintings Boyd created a remarkable blend that incorporated a pronounced characteristic of the northern European tradition of Breughel, Bosch, Rembrandt. Then he was to use traditional methods of making and mixing pigments and paints from the actual recipes used by the Old Masters which give the paintings a compellingly rich medieval glow: by contrast, he imposed the figures of Moses, Adam and Eve, the Prodigal Son and Susannah directly upon an Antipodean bushland so creating a modernist vision of the Apocalypse.

The paintings of Australian Aborigines were made after a lone trip to Central Australia. Here the sketchbooks reveal the artist's working method in terms of process from initial sketch through to more detailed drawing, finally to paintings themselves where the stylistic mode then breaks dramatically with previous work. Professor Bernard Smith, who supervised my research in the early stages drew my attention to a radio programme that he had made in 1962 in London on the work of Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd where he talked about comparative iconomorphic form in which he "drew attention to the ways in which both artists tended to use a personal stock of images which they constantly presented in new ways conflating and transforming them to suit their expressive purpose". Most significantly here Smith advised me that Boyd had in fact taped this talk himself and played it over several times. [1]

This was one of a number of individual, seemingly random factors in my Boyd research (no published discussion exists of this idea) that enabled firm and legitimate connections to be made between certain groups of work (such as the post-war Biblical painting that has received systematic analysis) and series such as the *Caged Painter* works of 1972-73 that until now have not been adequately discussed in their relation to Boyd's entire *oeuvre*. Indeed it is precisely such significant links that had to be tested and established in order to then more rationally comprehend Boyd's contribution. It was a question of firstly identifying the manifold shortcomings in the entire existing literature (which I discuss later in this Introduction) and then of establishing an accurate method for identifying key sources for all recognizable key groups of work and so applying it consistently.

Necessarily, areas of Boyd's work that have as a rule been marginalized, or had posed apparent contradictions in method, I have sought absolutely to rationalize. This is then my intended contribution to the proper appraisal today of Arthur Boyd, Australia's most outstanding twentieth century painter and indeed one of international standing at the time of his death in April 1999. But surprisingly, he has remained one who has hitherto only partially been understood. Boyd remained a very complex and contradictory individual, indeed as an artist his entire *oeuvre* was

characterized by profound contradictions.[6] Any man so gentle and self-effacing, yet who could create some of the twentieth century's most tormented images, in such woebegone reflections of a humanity shorn of all hope, merits a fair and rigorous treatment in modern art historical scholarship. Yet evasiveness amongst critics had persisted. If for example, Freudian analysis of the *Caged Painter* series had been suggested to me by Tom Rosenthal, (the critic and publisher responsible for most of the published work on Boyd) real instigator, with Boyd of the entire series of collaborative projects, I am bound to seek to more aptly qualify this assumption, before exploring the wider implications for Boyd's approach. And I now believe overdue analysis made of the turbulent yet enigmatic paintings of the early 1970s, for the proper core positioning of the entire series of Collaborative projects from the 1960s through to the late 1990s, has to be a central responsibility of the art historian; and it seems that this proper identification of sources has in fact duly removed the critical hiatus that had inhibited and forestalled a proper understanding of Boyd's work. Once those two sections of the work had been assessed in a properly analytical mode the specifics of the widely pervasive Landscape elements, and the generic motivation driving all of Boyd's work could then properly be appraised. Within the parallel scholarship applied by such specialists in other areas of Australian culture as Dr Tim Bonyhady on Mythology, and as the historian Don Baker in his radical re-assessment of the effect of European exploration there and its debilitating and confusing impact on the Aboriginal population, I was first challenged, then stimulated to probe on. But finally I trust resolved to complete what, in art historical terms has proved to be an emancipating process in seeking out the more accurate re-alignment of truth and reality in terms of the due and proper appraisal of Arthur Boyd, his *oeuvre*, and its ultimate achievement.

INTRODUCTION

(3) Method and Literature Review.

The organisation and method required for the study of Arthur Boyd, within the artistic biography, has been determined largely by the fact that a large body of literature on Boyd existed over many years. The most significant publications were: Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, (Thames and Hudson, London, 1966), and Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, with an Introduction by Tom Rosenthal, (André Deutsch, London, 1986) both of which comprise significant texts and are extensively illustrated. In 1973 *Arthur Boyd Drawings* was published (Secker and Warburg, London) with 1,875 drawings reproduced the size of postage stamps, and a further 85 plates. The text comprises three pages of Foreword. In 1971, similarly, *Arthur Boyd, Etchings and Lithographs*, contained 120 reproductions of prints but only six pages of text of a general kind. The latter two publications make available a large body of Boyd's graphic work, but offer no interpretation of the imagery. In addition, the published collaborative projects that include: *St Francis of Assisi*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, *Jonah*, *Narcissus*, *Lady and the Unicorn*, *Mars*, *Tomorrow's Ghosts* and *Lysistrata* provide a very large body of material by the artist that has not been studied in a properly systematic and even manner. Indeed the literature has, as viewed today, significant short-comings and is indeed noticeable obsolescent both in approach and technique. Grazia Gunn's exhibition catalogue essay: *Seven Persistent Images*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1985, helps to identify Boyd's personal iconography although her scholarship is not entirely reliable or consistent and her discussion of Boyd is now somewhat dated.[2] One could be forgiven for thinking that Arthur Boyd was an isolated genius from a gifted and accomplished family who owed little to anyone beyond the family for the development of his art. Indeed the most obvious drawback of the artistic biography as pursued to date has been to romanticise Boyd's life and development. Franz Philipp's scholarly iconographic study of Boyd's painting was produced when the artist was forty-six and while it set a precedent for a scholarly appraisal of his work it forms a discreet eulogy, tainted to a degree, by the

notion of the lone individual genius and correspondingly plays down the basis and extent of art-historical borrowing of imagery or the influence of fellow-artists, notwithstanding its legitimacy by any contemporary criteria today. Franz Philipp, an art historian who trained in Vienna, was a special case in academic transference: he was a passenger on the famous refugee boat Dunera that left Europe for Canada, yet in the chaos of war ironically ended up in Melbourne. On board were a cadre of intellectuals who subsequently made an identifiably major contribution to Australian cultural life. Philipp was soon invited to visit the Boyd's home at Murrumbeena and, newly arrived, was clearly captivated by the atmosphere there: one of intellectual tolerance and debate, comprising bohemian, spiritually – inspired individuals. But in waxing lyrical about the Boyd home he inevitably minimised the anguish and strain that Arthur Boyd experienced as a child and a young man. Today, it is due to the scholarship of Brenda Niall (1988) the biographer of Martin Boyd that a less romantic account of home life at Murrumbeena is revealed.[3] The true extent of penury helps to account for Arthur's material ambition and driven success in his own career and his remarkable prolific output.

Even though Boyd chose to isolate himself as an artist the influence of other artists, authors and poets remains all the more significant and needs to be addressed. By far the most glaring omission in the preceding literature on Boyd (which stems from the enlightenment "lone genius" construct) is the importance of the collaborative projects from 1965 to 1988. It is my fundamental contention that the projects that Boyd completed with TSR Boase and Peter Porter were fundamental to his ability to continue producing brilliantly original works into late career and to understanding his working method and the true relationship to his sources. Franz Philipp did analyse the project *St Francis of Assisi* (text by Boase, lithographs by Boyd, Thames and Hudson) in a detailed manner making references between the imagery, Boase's text and the original manuscripts that related to the life of St Francis. The other collaborative projects were completed following publication of Philipp's book. Nevertheless, Ursula Hoff twenty years later only offers brief discussion of the works by Boyd as

part of the collaborative projects with Boase and Porter but fails duly to acknowledge the collaborative projects as a major catalyst *per se* in the success of Boyd's career. The essays in the catalogue for the Retrospective Exhibition for the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1993 acknowledged by inclusion the works produced and published with Boase and Porter. The respective researchers and curators for the exhibition whilst contributing valuable work to the body of Boyd research (in particular in the location of paintings, chronology, bibliographies) did not come to terms with the critical void that has come to exist for the fair and true placement of Boyd's artistic career within Australian culture and beyond.

As a consequence the significant contribution has been unwittingly played down, somewhat unjustly. For the texts provided by them are not only quite outstanding in their own right, they are suffused with imagery richly layered with meaning for visual interpretation. Boyd indicated to friends at the time of the projects that he regarded that he was privileged to work with an individual of Porter's calibre yet, characteristically, in interviews over three years with me, he made only the most passing reference to the collaborative works. Indeed, contemporary research allows the distinct impression that by acknowledging their significance he felt that his own integrity would automatically be brought into question. Herein lies yet another paradox in Boyd's career. This artist was candid about the dangers of solipsism in the arts and yet was most careful to optimise such a methodology as would ensure the necessary accessibility and anticipatory revelation of the world of classical mythology and its accompanying poetry; so to secure the natural yet seemingly unpremeditated regeneration of his imagery. Although Porter in his experience felt largely resigned to the fact that paintings and graphic works were financially more viable than poems, he could not but feel that his personal and professional contribution to Boyd's career had been positively neglected, however unwittingly, by the artist himself who simply moved on to new and different obsessions, closing off the historically productive collaboration of those times. For whatever reason, until my study, no comprehensive analysis had been made of the central role of the collaborative projects. Franz Philipp

made a detailed appraisal of the *St Francis of Assisi Cycle* **(7.4-7.14)**; indeed Margaret Plant wrote a detailed critique on the same subject. Tom Rosenthal and Peter Porter have both separately referred to the way in which the projects were undertaken, but no single commentator has looked closely at them all. It would appear that the relevant inter-disciplinary studies have not been actively encouraged in Australian art history departments and indeed Boyd critique has languished unheeded. This is inexplicable since Porter's poetry is rich, complex and demanding. Boase for his part was a brilliant medievalist, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford and scripture scholar- admittedly not the most accommodating bed-fellows for the contemporary critics of the 1970s and 1980s. But there can be no excuse, in retrospect.

I myself then found that numerous paintings were so inherently almost perversely enigmatic that I needed to be given guidance by the artist himself. He usually only gave small clues. Only rarely would he give a lucid, comprehensive account of a particular painting – such as *The Mining Town*, 1946-47 **(4.9)** which he described to Peter Fuller for *Modern Painters*, in 1990. He would describe best those paintings that had already been analysed by a family member (such as his mother) or else by Franz Philipp. In my own series of interviews that took place over a period of four days in 1993 at the National Gallery of Australia we specifically discussed (on tape) *The Boat Builders, Eden*, 1946-47 **(4.21)**, one of his most beautiful paintings in egg tempera. He never once mentioned, then or subsequently, the profound and detailed borrowing from Breughel's *The Gloomy Day*, 1565, **(10.7)** : in terms of composition, detailing and anecdote this is a fruitful comparison by a living painter. Boyd actively persisted with the ambiguity and was coy about his influences. In visual terms he would take an image from a medieval painting, for example, but so infuse it with his own feelings and admiration for the image that he subsequently omitted to mention the specific debt or starting point (an occurrence not uncommon in literature). To create ambiguity he would, for example, combine features from Greek and Roman gods, fused in a single strange character whose intent could be menacing or at best confusing.[4] Although the hundred hours of interviews I recorded with him

and which he generously allowed were entirely necessary to signpost my research, most of the verbal (as opposed to visual) material he provided was only of limited use in this quest.

An artist boigraphy is in my view, not only legitimate in the case of Boyd, it is the most appropriate. And yet one has to approach the subject of Art and Life mindful of previous scholars tendency to present Arthur Boyd as an artist isolated from the mainstream, and therefore isolated from a community of artists, (which he in fact stated his need for at certain times - see Chapter Three), the product of a talented family. Franz Philipp's important study of Boyd will be examined in view of the fact that Boyd himself (in the 1960s when the book was written) concealed certain early friendships and influences. Having said that, the collection of short essays that form part of the book by Dobrez and Herbst, *The Art of the Boyds, Generations of artistic achievement*, (Bay Books, Sydney, 1990) that deserve to be especially singled out for their scholarship, humanity and perception: those recorded by an eye-witness, Peter Herbst in "Reflections of the Murrumbeena Experience". Although like Philipp he was clearly taken by the Boyd family, (Herbst later became Professor of Philosophy at the Australian National University) these recollections are perhaps modulated with time, and are respectful and understated. Like a number of Boyd family friends, Herbst worked in the Murrumbeena Pottery at the end of the war and had in his own collection over twenty years, some of the finest of Boyd's early Bride paintings.

My contribution to the scholarship on Arthur Boyd has been to identify and explore episodes which have not adequately been explained in terms of their sources and interdependence with on other groups of work, such as for example the early Biblical paintings or the recurrent landscape paintings. More specifically I have, following these protracted interviews been able in due course to attribute certain key paintings indisputably to Breughel. Therefore I have distinguished, for example, specifically between polio victim cripples and amputees. In doing so I have been able correctly to attribute key works to one or other direct source or event in art historical terms. Yet the attribution or sourcing of works primarily to the appropriate old master

as opposed to a contemporary event, does not in any way diminish Boyd's stature; rather does it give greater credibility to the working methods that he developed over his long and brilliant career. By giving due recognition to Arthur Boyd's friendship and respect for Noel Counihan it is possible to identify a political commitment (albeit humanistic, not card-carrying) in Boyd's work that then establishes a link between the anti-war work in the 1940s with the searing political work that was produced in collaboration with the poet Peter Porter in the 1970s and 1980s.

In the early stages of research I established a method for identifying sources initially with the *St Francis of Assisi Cycle*. There I had as a resource the thorough traditional, iconographic methods of Franz Philipp. The literary sources were excellent documents as such, as was the text by Boase. Having analysed each of 16 lithographs chronologically, in terms of ideas and formal devices of the graphic process I also looked for relevant significance in the character of St Francis to Boyd's own life: the ascetic existence, the committed, lifelong stand against materialism that could be found in a number of Boyd's biblical paintings (e.g. *The Golden Calf*, 1946-47 **(4.6)**), the strong paternal figure reminiscent of the Old Testament father. Autobiographical threads were woven into the analysis of visual images thus enabling a convincing explanation for Boyd's choice to illustrate the life of the medieval saint. I was mindful too of the distinct gap here between the narrative painting of Boyd in the 1960s and the abstraction and Pop art which was flourishing in Britain. I felt it necessary to develop an analysis of the main body of Boyd's work before attempting to explain the artist's unique and independent path. Following the analysis of the St Francis works, I felt better equipped to examine *Nebuchadnezzar*, 1966-68, **(7.15-7.26)**. These paintings illustrated the manner in which Boyd steeped himself in the ideas and sources of the Biblical king and Boase's fine commentary, and then with great originality and passion departed quite radically from tradition (just as he had by not illustrating the famous scenes from the life of St Francis that had appealed to other artists before him such as Giotto and Sassetta).[5]

In the case of St Francis, I was driven to pose questions such as "How did Boyd make a medieval story of a saint plausible in the 1960s when non-figurative art dominated the art-world?". Nebuchadnezzar was conjured with thick, impastoed paint often applied by hand or direct from large tubes. The physical involvement of the artist in the canvas made certain concessions to the painterly abstraction of the period, yet the subject matter was far removed from mainstream concerns. However, the question of relevance to contemporary art was revealed by Boyd's choice of episodes in the king's ultimate fall from grace. These works were initially prompted by the actions of anti-Vietnam war protestors setting fire to themselves in the early 1960s. The Boyds themselves, fully aware of events, had remained then firmly in England, understandably to avoid the risk of conscription of their son Jamie into the Australian army to fight in Vietnam. Hence, a personal element existed in the choice of image which Boyd found appropriate for the desperate character of Nebuchadnezzar. The profile of Nebuchadnezzar by Boyd is the profile of madness – psychological decline and alienation, themes as relevant to contemporary society as to the Old Testament. Indeed, what Boyd's paintings convey is the timelessness of the human struggle, within the Judaeo – Christian tradition of a Millennium, powerfully redolent with Freudian overtones and the threat of catastrophe.

In my study of Peter Porter's poetry as a backdrop for and dialogue with Boyd's late graphic work and painting, I was able to interview Porter at length. He introduced me to the ideas that helped to draw out the meaning from the poetry and the poet was instrumental for me in forging the link between the words and the images. It seemed to me that I experienced then something of the artist's own excitement, the selfsame creative thrill in being taken through Porter's compelling imagery; indeed so much of this was itself written by Porter with Arthur in mind, such as The Painter's Banquet:

> Little Andrea has drawn a sheep
> With a bright stone upon a smooth-faced rock
> Lucky for him a Medici is passing,

Soon the banquet will be set again.[6]

Porter's use of figures and references from classical mythology and the European cultural tradition gave Boyd further impetus to pursue his dialogue with art and literature from the past. In a poem called "The Prince of Anachronism", he writes: "All ages are contemporary, the present is made up of the past".[7] Both the expatriate Porter and the reclusive Boyd enjoyed in London the anachronistic combining of aspects of Australia and the European cultural tradition.

INTRODUCTION

(4) Contemporary Influence

As stated, the obvious characteristics then of Boyd's career are his dialogue with the Old Masters and the central role played by autobiography. This combination sets him apart from fellow artists both in Melbourne where he worked and developed his artistic identity and then in England where he lived and worked successfully for over thirty years. To illustrate his relationship with contemporary artistic trends I will cite two significant points in his life where he might reasonably have become dependent on others for ideas or direction for his artistic achievements, but where he maintained his artistic autonomy nonetheless.

In Melbourne during the Second World War, as various commentors have since observed, artists were unable to travel and suffered isolation and practical dislocation to their normal practice. Richard Haese made a specific study of the periods that spanned two decades from the Great Depression to the beginnings of the Cold War. What characterized the art of this period, he claimed, was "a deep and pervasive concern for realism, the reality of human and psychological experience at a time of unremitting crisis and intense intellectual struggle".[8] Haese put forward the view that a communalism developed among artists and writers, and indeed the debate on the role of art in wartime certainly polarized the artworld and strengthened the grouping of artists such as the social realists on one hand (Counihan, Bergner, O'Connor) and those surrounding the magazine *Angry Penguins* (Nolan, Tucker, Hester) in which the debate was published:

> Artists and writers lived together, talked, argued, and exchanged ideas on levels and in ways that have few parallels. In part this communalism was necessitated by the actively hostile or uncomprehendingly indifferent world in which radicals found themselves in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also, however, a part of the new social values that seemed indissolubly linked with the character

> of their art. As artists they were also highly articulate. It was this degree of political and intellectual awareness and ability to communicate with force and insight in both words and paint that ultimately produced a revolution in Australia's cultural life. [9]

When Haese's book *Rebels and Precursors The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, was published in 1981, I reviewed it for Labour History, [10] a journal at the Australian National University. I interviewed Peter Herbst (who had taught me Philosophy there) who to summarise, was deeply unhappy about the way in which Haese had effectively "re-located" Boyd to Heide, the home of patron John Reed, where the "Angry Penguin artists", Sidney Nolan and Albert Tucker were frequent visitors. Herbst was himself adamant that Boyd did not make a habit of visiting Heide, nor did he take part in the grouping of artists at the time, a point that is corroborated in the earlier study by Franz Philipp. Speaking of the conflict between artists at this point (1942) he wrote:

> Arthur Boyd was never mentioned. He obviously took no part in the battle, for which he was temperamentally quite unfit: he has throughout his life carefully avoided polemics and artistic partisanships ... Links of affection with (Yosl) Bergner, who also took no public part in the vituperations of this bitter feud, may have kept him a "spectator and non-participant" to use his own description.[11]

Peter Herbst's main contention, which is in line with my own subsequent research, is that Boyd did not feel the need to go beyond his family and the distinctive environment at Murrumbeena for his inspiration. He was invariably influenced to a certain extent by the discussions that took place with Bergner and by the contact he had with the work, for example, during what was an intense and stimulating period. These various influences are discussed in Chapters One and Two, yet no

contemporary artistic ideology or group of artists altered Boyd's independent path and maturing vision. At Murrumbeena the Boyd family and their friends provided a cohesive environment and a mutually beneficial support structure for each other. Employment at the Murrumbeena Pottery (established during the war) facilitated Boyd's discharge from the army and provided for him a modest income. Friends and family would buy Boyd's paintings and his most significant early commission was from his uncle, Martin Boyd, to pain murals at the re-acquired family house, The Grange, at Berwick, near Melbourne. When John Perceval married Mary Boyd and lived at Murrumbeena and painted together with Arthur Boyd he too, painted Biblical themes. There is no doubt, however, that it was Boyd who took the initiative and led the dialogue with the Old Masters, for while Perceval shared Boyd's fascination for Bosch and Breughel, he did not sustain such interest nor develop together his work in this vein throughout his career, or with the same passion and independence and Boyd at any stage.

In 1959 Boyd left Australia for London. There one might expect him to have experienced the impact of new artistic trends or to be influenced by the work of other artists. Boyd was fortunate to arrive in England at a point at which there was considerable interest in Australian art, indeed he seemed to be quite unaffected by abstract art or Pop art there. Boyd's views on art had been previously focussed to a degree by the Antipodean Manifesto (1959) of which he was signatory. It helped to articulate his predilection for art of the figurative tradition as opposed to being "swamped by American abstractionism", [12] to use his own words. Boyd maintained his independence, however, and on eventual arrival in Europe was keener to exhibit and actually sell paintings as well as regularly to visit museums to view the work of the masters whom he had only seen in reproduction. Peter Fuller's appraisal of Boyd's move to Europe leaves one in no doubt of the total, self-sustaining [20] independence of his vision:

> In 1959 Boyd left Australia to settle in England. There, in the era of all that Pop Silliness, he painted his great pictures on the theme of Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace – of man surviving in an intolerable environment. Later Boyd acquired a cottage in Ramsholt, on the Deben estuary – an eery and windswept part of East Anglia. There is something medieval about his landscape, something kissed by the mask of death. Even the Shell guide says that, in the land between the Ramsholt Arms and the church, 'the narrow valley of a tributary stream now blocked by the strengthened river wall, lies waste under sorrel and ragwort, smelling of death where myxomatosis comes'' Boyd looked at the landscape —now rendered and defiled, the cradle of cruise missiles and the American airforce – acknowledged its fall, and still found a terrible beauty there: the beauty that Breughel had glimpsed, or even Bosch in the garden of delights. [13]

In practical terms, there has always been a following in critical terms for figurative art of an expressionistic kind. Boyd's art received considerable critical attention and his consistently outstanding landscape painting always guaranteed him steady sales in Britain and Australia. Boyd remained realistic about his independent artistic path, and as I have explained in this study, he was able, positively to structure his career to ensure that he both remained prolific and yet was continually to be regenerated as an artist. The uniqueness of his career remains today complex and fascinating.

ENDNOTES:

1 1962 Bernard Smith "The Third Programme" BBC In an interview Boyd remembered this concept by Smith and believed that it had contributed to his confidence to change his work in stylistic terms.

2 See detailed footnotes 16 and 18 in Chapter Three for critical analysis of Gunn's method.

3 Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd: a life*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988.

4 See discussion of *The Australian Scapegoat Triptych*, 1988, Chapter Ten.

5 See Chapter Seven.

6 Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, *Narcissus*, London, 1984, pp. 8-10.

7 Peter Porter, "The Prince of Anachronism", from *The Automatic Oracle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987.

8 Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors, The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Allen Lane, Melbourne, 1981.

9 Ibid, vii

10 Janet McKenzie, Book Review of Rebels and Precursors, *Labour History*, 1981.

11 Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1966, pp. 29-30.

12 Arthur Boyd, Introduction to *The Antipodeans: Another Chapter*, (reconstruction of 1959 exhibition) Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, Melbourne, 1988-89.

13 Peter Fuller, *Theoria, Art and the Absence of Grace*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1988, p. 222.

PART II AUSTRALIA THE FIRST DECADE

CHAPTER ONE

Family Background: Early Work

Arthur Boyd was born in 1920 in Melbourne, Australia. He was the first son and second child of Merric and Doris (née Gough) Boyd. The couple had five children in all. The family life they provided was unusually creative and also unconventionally religious. Merric Boyd was a painter; Doris a painter who used her skills for the most part in the pottery established by her husband. Many other members of the Boyd family before them were painters; Arthur Boyd's decision to become an artist was a natural progression of his unorthodox upbringing and his ancestry of which the family was very proud. Theirs was the third generation of artists in the Boyd family. All of the five children became involved in the visual arts — Arthur and David became painters and potters, Guy became a potter and sculptor and the two sisters Lucy and Mary became painters and married artists.

When the then Prime Minister, Mr. Paul Keating, gave the opening address at Arthur Boyd's Retrospective Exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, he was keen that Arthur Boyd be viewed in the context of his family:

> The Boyds have been intimately connected with art and letters in Australia for well over a century. And in a country which has only known two centuries of European settlement, such a family contribution to our history is surely unique. It is fair to say that, for ordinary Australians, the idea of being grateful for the existence of particular families is somewhat a novel idea. From the early days of the colony we have rejected the idea of a bunyip aristocracy, of the idea of a special status deriving from the inheritance of money, or property or other privilege. But the Boyd family is nothing like that. Their status derives from the spiritual rather than the material dimension — from the fertility of their imagination, and their ability to convert it by pen, paintbrush or potter's wheel to a vision of ourselves which we otherwise might not have had.[1]

Franz Philipp claims that Boyd's family background accounts for a number of distinct features in Arthur Boyd's artistic development:

> . . . the strong feeling for artistic tradition, remarkable in an artist who played a major part in transforming this tradition, and with it the artistic climate of his country, during the war and the years immediately following it; a love of the 'traditional media', which he has favoured above the plastic-synthetic types of paints and paint vehicles throughout his career, and which he has re-explored and revived. Family background and temperament have made Arthur Boyd a traditionalist revolutionary — if I may use this somewhat paradoxical compound: he is perhaps more conscious of a wider past than most of his contemporaries, and at the same time maintains a detachment from contemporary artistic conventions, a freedom in the handling of the artistic language of his time combined with unpolemical disregard of the academies, both older and newer.[2]

The Boyd family in Australia, had their origins both in Scotland initially, and then in Ireland. This is not exactly an Anglo-Australian provenance as is the background of numerous Australian families; rather more specifically of a Celtic derivation. In Scotland the Boyds could claim a clear descent from the Boyds, Earls of Kilmarnock, through a cadet line settled at Crosspatrick in County Mayo, Ireland, in the eighteenth century.[3] There, Boyd sons tended to follow a military career. Captain John Boyd, born in County Kerry in 1825, had followed this pursuit and was gazetted an Ensign in the 11th Regiment of Foot, which had been his father's regiment. In 1845 the regiment was posted to Australia, sailing in the vessel Marion which carried convicts to Van Diemens Land. By the early 1850s, John Boyd, now Captain Boyd, achieved the appointment of Assistant Military Secretary to Governor La Trobe.[4] In 1857 Captain Boyd was refused the hand of Lucy Martin, daughter of a prosperous settler, Dr. Robert Martin. As a consequence, the couple decided to elope and were married at St. Stephen's Church, Richmond, in Melbourne, in February 1857.[5] Boyd's regiment, due to return to England, left without him. But Martin now came to accept his new son-in-law, and provided a substantial dowry of £5000 for

Lucy Boyd.[6] Initially the couple settled at Otago, New Zealand, but in 1875, the year after Dr. Martin's death, returned with their ten sons and one daughter, to live in Melbourne, to live comfortably if in a somewhat cramped style (for such a large family) at Glenfern, in Inkerman Rd., St. Kilda. In due course the Boyds met the à Beckett family, of ancient English origin, in the lively social *milieu* to which they had returned.

Sir William à Beckett had a clear descent from an English family that traced its origin as far back as the fifteenth century.[7] But at the end of the eighteenth century the original manor house, of Littleton, near West Lavington in Wiltshire, had passed out of the family. Through a good marriage they were, however, able to acquire another estate, Penleigh in the same county. William à Beckett's descent here appeared to be from the Reverend Thomas à Beckett on the distaff side: and a younger son's line therefore inherited the Penleigh estate. To Sir William à Beckett, successful as first Chief Justice of Victoria, this was all in the past.

The settlement in Melbourne of Arthur Boyd's great-grandparents, Captain and Mrs. Boyd, was auspicious for the future well-being of their children. Their son, Arthur Merric Boyd **(10.2)**, who had become a painter, married a fellow-painter Emma Minnie à Beckett **(10.3)**. The grandfather of Emma, the Hon. William Arthur Callender à Beckett (member of the Melbourne Legislative Council) and nephew of Sir William à Beckett, had married one Emma Mills, heiress to the Melbourne Brewery family.[8] The generation that followed thus now grew up against a background of wealth and stability which enabled talent to flourish and individual inclination to pursue an artistic career to be followed up. In due course Arthur Boyd's father, Merric Boyd, potter and sculptor, married a painter of his own time, Doris Gough.

There has been considerable interest in the numerous family descents and connections of the early Boyds, the à Becketts, and the Mills families. But ultimately the relevant facts are those which give some indication of the family environment and aspirations within which Arthur Boyd himself developed to adulthood as a painter. Here it is clear that in Arthur Boyd's constitution are found a replication of a wide

range of the various strands which go to make up the average twentieth-century Australian family of mainly British origins. That is to say there is a minglingof Scots, Irish, and English blood in each individual. The Boyds are no different in this respect. But what is different is the degree to which the Boyd family (and the à Becketts with whom they were so cosily intertwined in everyday life) would claim two identities: one was by affiliation to the social mores of England as the centre of the British Empire at the time: the other was that of the Victorian establishment and its own Australian patrimony. These two loyalties might have seemed mutually cohesive; but in the twentieth century as the two worlds drew apart, that of Europe and that of Australia as a developing society, strains occurred which had a profound effect upon each individual's imageof his or herself. Such were the demands of two world wars, to a greater or lesser degree fought over issues of only the remotest importance to Australians, and which yet drew into conflict and death large sections of Australian men and women.

Separate writing on the Boyds, especially Merric Boyd and more famously, the author Martin Boyd, Arthur Boyd's uncle, has established without doubt the extent to which such circumstances affected the family.[9] For Martin Boyd, these two poles of England and Australia may have provided the inspiration for his successful literary *oeuvre* as a writer of fiction, but their oppositions drained his energy ultimately and drew him, almost as a refugee, to Roman Catholicism, and to Rome, where he died in 1972. Gradually too, the financial inheritance of the Boyds, accumulatedthrough marriagesin the nineteenth century, diminished in the twentieth century, forcingthe abandonment of all property that was not Australian.

For Arthur Boyd, such distractions seem fortunately to have been marginal. Like Sidney Nolan, he was drawn in the post-war period to London and to Europe; and this need for European sanctuary and inspiration never left Boyd, whose own son the painter Jamie Boyd has firmly based his own family in London. Apart from this family, and the five grandchildren it has produced to the delight of Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, and their daughter Lucy and her three children, their identity has

remained firmly Australian-based.[10] Unlike Nolan, Arthur Boyd has retained full Australian citizenship. While living in Suffolk, he has remained spiritually and intellectually an inhabitant of Australia, preferably Bundanon, the estate which he built up with hard-won sales of paintings, and which in January 1993 he donated to the Australian people. Arthur Boyd therefore never was drawn into the migratory syndrome that swallowed his uncle Martin, and his only identity has been as Australian, easy in his shoes as such, whether in Italy or in England. The great paintings remain resolutely, supremely Australian.

In the context of a study of Arthur Boyd the character and personality of his father Merrric Boyd is important. As a child Merric was always difficult and his temper and unusual behaviour made for anxiety within the family, especially after the tragic death of the amiable and adored first son Gilbert in a riding accident in 1896 when he was eight. Merric's intense behaviour was probably the first sign of the epilepsy which was to plague him all his life. Tadgell interprets the position:

> His father's liberal humanism, on one hand, and his mother's religious mysticism predisposed them to be uncensorious of Merric's inexplicablebehaviour but his own consciousness of peculiarity led him increasingly into isolation.[11]

Illness caused him to leave school early at the age of fifteen. Merric attended Dookie Agriculture College in 1905-6 with the view to go into farming but did not complete the course and did not apply himself to farming the family's Yarra Glen property. In 1909 he believed himself to be suited to a religious life and enrolled, in 1909, at St. John's TheologicalCollegein St. Kilda. He did not sustain the interest for long however. He was becoming an artist with an interest in sculpture when he discovered pottery. It was not a recognised industry in Australia and yet his parents, showing characteristic Boyd encouragementand generosity, built a pottery for him in 1910. By 1912 Merric Boyd had an unrivalled position in Australia as an artist potter.

His hand-modelled ceramics were original and received encouraging press coverage**(10.5)**

Merric Boyd had an obsessive approach to art. He was driven by the need for stability (and respite from the suffering brought about by his epileptic fits) and also from the views he shared of William Morris and John Ruskin and of the ideas behind the Arts and Crafts Movement. His own family had subscribed to *The Studio* magazine from 1893 which championed the Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris's idea that art is "as necessary to man as his daily bread" was consistent with Merric Boyd's evangelical zeal towards his work and his life.[12] The two were indivisible. Bernard Smith observed, however:

> Merric Boyd certainly failed to implement in Australia the wider social and artistic ambitions of the Arts and Crafts Movement but he and his wife succeeded in the more delicate task of establishing a creative home and workshop for the family in which art was pursued as an essential aspect of moral and spiritual perception. It was very much a case of 'education through art' successfully conducted years before the late Sir Herbert Read coined the phrase. So that it became possible for the tenderness and fear which the father discerned in the paws of the kangaroo and in the melting eye of the koala to be seen by his sons much later in the hands and eyes of aborigines and survivors from Buchenwald.[13]

In 1917 Merric Boyd joined the Australian Flying Corps. His experiences during the war affected him very deeply and when one considers the dramatic response of Arthur Boyd during the next world war when he did not himself experience armed combat, it is reasonable to assume that the strain caused by the war on Merric Boyd was such that it affected his attitudes and approach to life and to the upbringing of his children most profoundly. Smith refers to the effects of the Great War on Merric Boyd's generation:

> . . . the unspeakable, unimaginable human carnage of World War I. For him . . . perhaps the pursuit of art became a personal defence against the innate savagery of humankind, an art used as an inner necessity for

> the survival of the personality and for whom popular recognition . . . was irrelevant.[14]

Following the Armistice he was able to study at the Wedgewood factory and at the Stoke Technical Factory in England where he was able to acquire valuable knowledge of the technical aspects of the production of pottery. When Merric Boyd returned from the war in 1919 he moved to the outer Melbourne suburb of Murrumbeena. Arthur Boyd was born there the following year and spent most of the first thirty years of his life there.

Comparing the homelife of Merric Boyd's family to that of the previous generation, Brenda Niall, author of the biography of Martin Boyd writes:

> The centre of Boyd family life in 1948 was Open Country, Murrumbeena, where Merric's pottery had been established during World War I. Lucy, Arthur, Guy, David and Mary grew up there in the Depression years . . . in real poverty. To be the son of the unworldly Minnie Boyd had been embarrassing at times; to be Merric's children was often painful. He was usually described as eccentric because no one could think of a better word; he was *sui generis.* His extreme religious fervour, his love for his family, his obsessive dedication to his art and his almost complete indifference to the world around him were his most obvious qualities. His epileptic attacks, which became severe in the late 1920s, seemed not a random affliction but almost an aspect of his personality. When his son Arthur read Dostoevski he recognized something like Merric's intensity of spirit.[15]

Franz Philipp recalls from his own experience of the Boyd home in the early 1940s, that there was a "spiritual climate in which art and religion were indeed very close to each other, merging in a religiosity of a mystic kind which could perhaps be described as Blakian."[16] Franz Philipp also describes the character of Open Country thus:

> The setting was hardly middle-class suburbia — neither materially nor in its mental climate— but somewhat bohemian and eccentric. The old ramblinghouse with its overgrown garden. . . sheltered an artist family which tended to overflow into an artists' colony. The ordinary

> problems of daily life and sustenance were treated with insouciance if not disregard.[17]

Philipp described the financial position as 'aristocratic poverty' but there was nothing 'genteel' about it.

From childhood Arthur Boyd's artistic pursuits received encouragement, in the broadest sense. His mother's willingness to discuss his early paintings and his grandfather's provision of art materials on account at a store in Melbourne allowed the young artist to experiment in a supportive and unself-conscious environment. He left school at the age of fourteen, for financial reasons, and lived with his grandfather on the Mornington Peninsula also near Melbourne. There he painted the landscape. By this stage, he was sixteen, he had a formative knowledge of the Bible and an introduction to literature in spite of so little formal education; further he had a curiosity for moral and ethical issues. When the war came the philosophical issues surrounding war in the abstract, and Australia's role in a world war were subjects for discussion in the family home. In the next chapter I will examine the effect of war on Boyd and the influence of a number of important individuals who visited his family at Murrumbeena and became his friends.

Boyd's family life was in stark contrast to middle-class suburban life in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s or working-class life there. Compared to fellow artists who came from more typical social or economic backgrounds, such as Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan or Noel Counihan, those with whom he associated in Melbourne in his twenties, Boyd began his artistic career with considerable knowledge of art and for a young man a very great receptivity to ideas. As a result Boyd was able to pursue a completely individual path.

The benefits to a young artist of having a supportive background cannot be under-estimated. However, a distinction between the artistic life of Arthur Boyd and the artistic careers of his forebears, is required. His art has at no point simply been the genteel occupation of members of a class who, like Boyd's grandparents, did not need to earn a living. Indeed Arthur Boyd has had great financial success as an artist and has

supported an extended family in the way his own grandparents and great-grandparents had before him. Boyd's uncle Penleigh showed great promise as a young artist. In 1909 he arranged a private viewing of his paintings in his studio in East Melbourne where he sold a number of works:

> Penleigh followed his father in being almost exclusively a landscape painter. His work, influenced mainly by Streeton and Walter Withers, appealed to an Australian public which had learned to value the Heidelberg School of painters. In many ways he had an unusually privileged entry into the art world, not only through his parents' teaching and example but through their friendship with the best-known Australian painters of the time, including Conder, McCubbin and Withers.[18]

Of his generation, Penleigh Boyd seemed to have the most talent and drive. **(10.4)** He left Australia in 1911 to spend two years in England and France. In fact Penleigh's greatest achievement in Europe was to find true happiness in love and marriage rather than an artistic blossoming.[19] His short time in Paris was spent mostly in the company of his fiancée (they married there in 1912). "The excitement of the Post-Impressionists and Futurists passed him by, perhaps because of an innate conservatism or because of the sudden happiness of his private world."[20] With hindsight, it is Arthur's father Merric (Penleigh's brother) who displayed the more dramatic visual talent. His personality prevented the worldly success of his brother, who is described as being, "good-looking and amusing; and he had the warmth and ease of manner which made it a pleasure to buy one of his paintings".[21]

Boyd's intensely private home life revealed itself in a series of paintings done in the 1960s following the death of his parents; Merric Boyd in 1959 and Doris Boyd in 1960. Much of Boyd's imagery is enigmatic but the dreamlike, poetic works reveal the necessity for Arthur Boyd to come to terms with what was at times a difficult personal development.

The *Potter* paintings **(2.34)** portraying the artist's father Merric Boyd are, not surprisingly, dramatic and at times tormented images when one considers his temperament and the effect of his suffering on his eldest and extremely sensitive son:

> The beautiful ceramics made in the Murrumbeena pottery were unprofitable, not merely because of the Depression, but because Merric turned to economic disaster everything he touched. His children were not sheltered, as Martin, Penleigh and Merric himself had been. Arthur left the Murrumbeena State School to work in his maternal uncle's paint factory for twelve and sixpence a week. Guy at one time worked as a builder's labourer; David took a job as a piano tuner. That theirs was not a grim Dickensian childhood was due partly to the help given by the Boyd grandparents, and also to the spirit and talents of Doris Boyd.[22]

Even the gentle images such as *Potter Drawing a Brown Cow in the Suburbs* (1967-8),**(2.33)** show the somewhat eccentric character of the artist's father. Arthur Boyd recalls his awareness as a child that his own father was alone in the precarious pursuit of artistic goals: other children experienced the comfort of convention in their way of life while Merric Boyd embarrassed his children by drawing animals in a suburban setting. The young Arthur was acutely aware that his family's garden was overgrown and untidy and that their lives were dominated by poverty and his father's epilepsy.[23] *Potter Drawing by Sea* (1967-8),**(2.26)** has a maturity in terms of attitude and technical proficiency; it is also a tender image of the artist's father. The subtly illuminated face on the portrait of his father seems to share the same quality as that conveyed to express the spiritual enlightenment of St. Francis of Assisi whom the artist portrayed in the late 1960s. The portrait of Merric Boyd drawing (his main creative activity in his later life) is one of characteristic candour and simplicity. In front of Merric Boyd on the sand stands a small seagull almost posing for its portrait, quite safe in close proximity to the large intense man. Arthur Boyd conveys a beautiful image of his father in harmony with nature, kind to all living creatures and yet isolated by his personality and medical condition from other people. In a universal context it is an image that places man in the infinite space of life (the sea), against the

menacing and inevitable shadow of death (the black cloud). Art in this painting provides meaning and illumination (reflected light on the artist's face) in a life that is otherwise dark and lonely.

Doris Boyd played a vital role in her son's development as an artist. The paintings of her in the *Potter* series are a tender testament to this contribution. Indeed, throughout Boyd's *oeuvre* the strongly determined female figure is often a portrait of the artist's mother. Boyd also used the face of his friend Betty Burstall with her distinctive dark curly hair as his angel in a number of works including *The Expulsion* 1947-48. **(4.11)**

Two of Boyd's early paintings in the *Potter* series, painted between 1964 and 1967, show his mother as a frail and tender individual in their Murrumbeena garden. *Potter's Wife in Garden at Murrumbeena* and *Potter's House at Murrumbeena* **(2.31)** place Doris Boyd in a close relationship with nature, created by Boyd by the gentle brushwork that unifies the canvas. The figure and animal in each of these works is given the same gentle paint handling as the foliage and building (in *Potter's House*). There is in both the tenderness and humility again that Boyd created in the *St. Francis* series also of the 1960s. Boyd had the deepest respect for his mother and in his attitude there is a spirituality which came naturally later when he explored the life of St. Francis, especially in this context, the tender images of women. Enveloped by nature — the soft swirls of paint joining figure and plants — Boyd seeks to express the philosophical nature of his mother's outlook that made her respect human life and concern for spiritual and ethical matters.

Potter's Wife: Figure in a Wave (1967-9), displays the vulnerability of Doris Boyd. She is referred to by their son as 'the Potter's Wife' not by her own Christian name. She was very much subject to her husband and to the difficulties brought about by his temperament and medical condition. She bore the brunt of raising their children under strained circumstances and yet she remained a free spirit. She was an intellectual who held strong religious ideas and had a gentle manner. The wave shows Doris Boyd

succumbing to the intense circumstances in life but it also shows her as being, in a fundamental way part of nature:

> She decorated much of Merric's pottery, produced paintings and ceramic figures of her own, and stimulated her children's creativity by teaching and example. Her wit and warmth helped to make Open Country a welcoming, lively place, an intellectual oasis in Outer Melbourne. In the 1940s the 'Brown Room' in the Murrumbeena house drew a circle of intellectuals, artists and writers; the talk was of art, music, theatre, religion, philosophy. Its atmosphere was as hard to define as to resist.[24]

Arthur Boyd was very much a product of his family background and home life, and yet from an early stage in his artistic development he proved that he was a unique and original artist. Early landscapes displaying his freedom and innocence possess a life of their own; it is perhaps by the extent of Arthur Boyd's precocity and through his ability to work independently at a young age that he was distinguished from other members of his family. The encouragement he received from his family and the discipline he developed at an early stage meant that when he encountered stimulus in the form of personal or art historical experience, he was able to generate a personal vocabulary and in turn create artistic statement of absolute independence. Unlike his own artist forebears Arthur Boyd's art has not been limited to the reflection of life or by a personal response; there has always been a universality in his work and a desire and readiness to challenge established conventions in both conceptual and formal terms.

The local school which Arthur Boyd attended was in the Melbourne suburb of Murrumbeena. It was an experimental school and had only 30 pupils. He received the drawing prize at the school for four consecutive years (1931-4). In 1934 he met the artist Wilfred McCulloch (whose brother Alan became a painter, writer and critic) on the beach at Wilson's Promontory. The friendship was important for the young Boyd and in the same year they painted together with Harold Beatty at an 'artist's camp' near Cape Schanck.[25]

Paintings done in 1934 and 1935 display an outstanding talent; they grew out of family life — interiors and portraits and of his immediate environment, for example *My Father Merric Boyd's Pottery* (1934) **(2.3)** and nearby *Oakleigh Brickworks* (1934). *The Brown Room* (the living room at Open Country, Murrumbeena) (1935) **(2.32)**, as Ursula Hoff has stated, was done in the tonal manner of Max Meldrum. It was "a light-suffused but impersonal image. The room could have been anywhere in the Melbourne art of the 1930s".[26]

Boyd's drawings and paintings of the period 1935-40 display a wide range of experimentation. The knowledge he acquired in terms of observation of natural phenomena and of human insight in portraiture was profound. It enabled him, after this period of gestation, to flower by means of a series of dramatic artistic statements as a young man in the 1940s. For example, in 1943 Boyd painted *The Brown Room*, **(2.29)** again and a comparison of the two works displays the development of his work from the 'impersonal image' to a work of originality. Boyd's ability to make a highly-charged personal statement came from his absorption of Expressionist ideas that came about through seeing reproductions of work by Van Gogh, and Oskar Kokoschka. His contact with the Polish émigré painter in Melbourne, Josl Bergner, also expanded his knowledge of the emotional potential of the painted image.

In 1935 Boyd left school and took a job in his uncle's (Ralph Madder) paint factory in Fitzroy. At the same time he also attended night classes at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne. He stayed at the factory for three years: he left the National Gallery Art School after six months, however, feeling disenchanted. Of this period he recalled:

> When I worked in the factory areas of Melbourne, I noticed the poor social conditions of the people. The intense pressure of the war and the impact of the observations altered my visual stimulus. My immediate surroundings greatly contrasted with my life at Murrumbeena. All this furthered the tendency to take a new direction and I began to express something of these conditions.[27]

Boyd's early drawings and paintings during the 1930s were landscapes, portraits of members of his family and still-lifes. He was tutored by members of his family but began also to add the influence of other individuals. In 1935 Boyd and Wilfred McCulloch 'discovered' Van Gogh and Oskar Kokoschka in postcard reproductions in the room of Boyd's cousin Robin Boyd.[28] Arthur began to take notice of other 'modern' painters in reproduction in Gino Nibbi's bookshop and The Primrose Pottery Shop, both in Little Collins Street, Melbourne. He was influenced by his cousin Pat (brother of Robin) who taught him to use a palette knife. They often painted together between 1934 and 1936.

> Pat had already begun to be a very good painter with an unusually modern approach. At our age, sixteen and eighteen, we felt we were rather more *avant-garde* than our elders. I saw my own approach to landscape painting as more like that of Van Gogh.[29]

Boyd's early work is both focused and experimental. There is a complete lack of self-consciousness that one might expect from a tentative young artist. Boyd's decision to become an artist was a natural progression of his childhood. He knew from an early age that his family held unconventional views and that his life would take an independent path.

Doris Boyd (1934) **(see also 2.7)**, in charcoal and chalk, *Merric Boyd with Overcoat in an Armchair* (c.1935), in pencil and *Portrait of Mary Boyd* (1937), are among dozens of works completed by Arthur Boyd at Murrumbeena. They show his desire to experiment and approach his subject in a variety of media and styles. *Self-Portrait with Blue Shirt* (1936) **(2.16)**, is one of numerous self-portraits done during the early years and through which the young artist's aspirations and dreams were shaped.

In 1936, following the death of his grandmother, Emma Minnie Boyd, his grandfather sold their Sandringham house and moved to Rosebud on Port Phillip Bay. Arthur Boyd lived with him for three years and recalls that it was an idyllic existence.

He received tuition from his grandfather Arthur Merric Boyd who (as noted previously) critically also gave him an account for materials. During this period of stability and freedom he painted landscapes, coastal views and portraits. *Portrait in Red Shirt* (1936), has a literary dimension and reveals something of the young artist's day-to-day life.

In Martin Boyd's novel *The Lemon Farm*, there is a character with whom the young artist identified:

> In . . . the *Lemon Farm* there was a character who rides around or sails a boat out in the Bay. I didn't have a boat at this time, not a proper one so I tried to get into his shoes. I managedto get a red jumper and then I made a boat, a punt type boat to ride up and down the tidal creeks at Rosebud. The tidal creeks had lots of rushes and it was very hard to push through them. I managedto persuade my grandfather to allow me to make some alterations to the punt and turn it into a boat by putting a rudder or keel and putting a point on it and a sail. I was able to go in fairly shallow water along the shore and that way my identification was complete and I gave up worrying about it anymore.[30]

At Rosebud Boyd had a prolific phase as a young artist. While his grandfather, also a painter, provided materials on account — (the generous quantity meant that he did not have to be 'stingy')[31] — and discussed the young Arthur's work, he does not appear to have influenced in stylistic terms.

> My grandfather . . . wouldn't have advised me so much as he would talk about the pictures when I brought them back to the house. I had a bike with a little trailer attached and I'd do two or three in a day. He would be very helpful.[32]

> The grandfather was essentially (though not exclusively) a watercolour landscapist, represented in many Australian public and private collections, a painter of gentle and observant landscapes of mood, impressionist only in the widest and vaguest sense of the work. Arthur Boyd's paintings of this period do not show any direct influence of the older Arthur Merric Boyd's manner.[33]

Nor do the landscape paintings of this period share much in common with other artists of the 1930s. Boyd chose to use the palette knife almost exclusively and he layered the paint quite thickly. The impasto method gives the works a tactile quality which is at times almost sculptural; this same quality can be found in his ceramic paintings of, for example, the late 1940s and 1950s. In fact Boyd recalls that working with a palette knife was related to ceramic techniques:

> I liked the idea of how the purity of the colours was retained and also how they had an energy. The paint didn't get muddy and was easier to handle. It almost related to a pottery technique, Slip painting is a bit like using a palette knife. I liked the clarity and I liked the brightness and I found it refreshing to do.[34]

Boyd's desire in landscapes such as *Dark Landscape with Cypress Hedge* (1937) **(see also 2.11, 2.18)**, *Dark Landscape with Stormy Sky* (1937), and *Landscape with Grazing Sheep* (1937) **(8.1)**, was to create an atmosphere, not a realistic rendering of the landscape before him. He admits to being influenced by Frederick McCubbin and also by Charles Conder.[35] *The Jetty, Rosebud* (1934) **(2.6)**, shows a debt to Conder but his impasto strokes announce his conversion to Expressionism.[36] Minute detail or illusionism are absent in Boyd's 1930s landscapes. Often the single presence is of a gnarled tree. There is no human presence. Symbolism was not consciously conceived at this early stage and yet there is a powerful sombre mood created in a number of these works. The stormy clouds, and cypress trees denote a sinister drama unfolding. The sheep in his landscapes of 1937 in face resemble tombstones. Boyd's *Self-Portraits*, **(2.1, 2.2, 2.4)** reveal the serious motives of the young artist.

In 1937, aged only seventeen, Boyd held his first solo exhibition at the Westminster Gallery in Little Collins Street, where he sold a number of works.[37] In the same year his cousin Robin Boyd, who later became a well-known architect and author, designed for him a studio at Open Country which was paid for by his

grandfather and built himself. In 1940 Arthur and his grandfather returned from Rosebud to Murrumbeena where his grandfather died later the same year.

Even as an adolescent, Arthur Boyd's work has "consistently alternated between naturalistic and imaginativephases":

> He has been a landscape painter and a creator of symbols throughout his career— indeed, the two aspects have often been closely linked . . . His 'Peninsula landscapes' show an unquestioning surrender to an environment which is, of course, Australian, but less typically and programmatically so than that favoured by the tradition of Australian 'impressionism'. He does not paint bush landscapes, then, nor the fertile wheat or pastoral country of Australia Felix. His landscapes are neither optimistic nor challenging— the two main emotional overtones of Australian landscape painting. Within the Port Phillip district . . . the least picturesque motifs are selected. His is a pastoral landscape but not arcadian: parsimonious, windswept, with the high cloudy sky of the coastal region . . . The emotional overtone is subdued, one of calm contentment and affection.[38]

As well as the paintings that Boyd himself describes as serious (for example the landscapes with sheep), he painted a number that were more naive and childlike. These were the earliest examples of a narrative painting in the sense that they were intended to tell a story or at least allude to another world, that of literature and ideas. His mother, Doris Boyd, played an important role in the creation of these works. They were painted firstly at Rosebud where *Beach, Man and Seagull* (1939),**(see also 2.19)** introduced a figure and a bird. Unlike the impastoed, palette knife paintings Boyd introduced a considerable degree of movement of the images around the picture plane. These works possess a freedom and life of their own, they are endowed with a separate reality.

> The reason for changing or experimenting, for not keeping with the same style, was partly to see yourself doing something different . . . What's been consistent is the effort to change.[39]

Red Roofs and Pine Trees (1940) **(see also 2.18, 2.21, 2.22)**, has a unity and visual coherence. He was interested at this time in a minimal approach, that of painting down the subject, removing superfluous detail. Yet it remains quite different stylistically to the sheep paintings and paintings such as *Sheoak Reflected in Tidal River* (1937) **(2.17)**. In contrast to *Sheoak*, which is carefully constructed and sparse in appearance, *Red Roofs and Pine Trees* is looser and more poetic. *The Escapists* (1940), once painted was shown by Arthur Boyd to his mother:

> She was always thinking of titles for the novels she was going to write — she did a lot of writing. She thought it looked a little bit like some figures escaped from the asylum but they were also escaping from life. The idea was that they were enlarged children. I think this is what her interpretation was. There's an element of Christopher Wood in there which I had seen in reproduction. He was an English painter . . . with a funny sense of humour, both gloomy and cheerful.[40]

The asylum theory of Doris Boyd was based on the fact that there was a mental institution near Open Country in Murrumbeena from which people occasionally escaped.

Family after a Bushfire is painted in a similar manner to *The Escapists* and is also intended to conjure a narrative. Painted after a year of terrible bushfires in Victoria which left thousands of people homeless, Boyd's image is sketchy and conveys the desperation experienced by individuals in the face of the destructive forces of nature, a theme that Boyd returned to on many occasions throughout his career. The flowers dominate the painting, the red hot pokers are the only plant that grew back after the fire.

These paintings share the naivety of Danila Vassilief,[41] a Russian painter who arrived in Australia in 1939. Boyd was not, however, closely acquainted with that artist's work at this stage. His knowledge of Expressionism influenced his approach to painting and broadened the possibilities available to him. *Sand Dunes, Back Beach,*

Rye,(1939) **(2.14)**, is not a narrative work but shares the airy, lightness of touch employed by Boyd at this stage.

The significanceof the period of time spent with his grandfather between 1936 and 1939 at Rosebud is apparent in the development of the young artist's work. Throughout Boyd's career his dialogue with the Australian landscape is constantly reinvented. The basis for the discipline — both in terms of his powers of observation and in terms of the daily devotion to the artist's work routine — was firmly established during the 1930s. As an adolescent Boyd interpreted the Australian landscape in an independent manner.

The other major event or encounter experienced by Boyd in the 1930s was meeting Josl Bergner. Bergner, a Viennese Jewish painter, who had lived in Warsaw before travelling to Melbourne in 1936 had direct experience of European Expressionism. He exerted considerable influence on the Melbourne artistic revolt of the late 1930s and 1940s. Arthur Boyd's meeting with Bergner was not of immediate significanceon his painting but Bergner's presence in the Melbourne art world was itself very important. Bergnerwas introduced to the Boyd family by their close friend Max Nicholson.

> Max Nicholson became a friend of the family. He visited us every Sunday eveningfor many years, always bringingsome book he had just got hold of, and would read aloud. He introduced us to Kierkegaard, Rimbaud, Joyce, Emily Dickinson and Kafka, as well as rereading many of the classics with great enthusiasm. He was more interested in teachingthan anyone I've ever known. . . . He was like an impresario. He enjoyed makingliterary discoveries. He beganthe Marlowe Society, a dramatic society at Melbourne University in the mid-forties, which I believe is still in existence. Max Nicholson's Sunday readings would sometimes go on to the early hours. My mother always listened absorbed. I valued these readings.[42]

Josl Bergner arrived in Melbourne from Europe just before his seventeenth birthday. He had not painted seriously at this stage. He was separated from his family and had to work in a knitting factory in Melbourne while he lived with his sister in a

Parkville tenement.[43] His father left for America a month after they arrived in Australia and they were not reunited until 1950. Bergner's mother arrived in 1939. Bergner's paternal grandmother died in a concentration camp in Germany during the war. Bergner's own experiences and his knowledge of the situation for Jews in Europe informed his work:

> As with no other painter, Bergner's background was to inform, enrich and deepen his canvases. On this ground alone it is no wonder that he spoke so directly and powerfully to his contemporaries in Australia. Bergner's first three years in Melbourne were lonely and difficult. He was always hungry, despite support from sympathetic Jewish friends, and was forced to work for survival at a seemingly endless series of menial jobs in Carlton sweat-shops. [44]

Arthur Boyd's friendship with Bergner was of great significance to him: Boyd recalls his early acquaintance with Bergner in 1938:

> Josl and I were the same age but our backgrounds had been totally different. I hadn't met anyone like him before, with his terrible experiences of deprivation and persecution and separation from his family. When I pulled out the Rosebud pictures from under the bed to show him he was rather critical, but I think he was impressed by the fact that I was able to sell my paintings. Eventually he came around to a more tolerant view of my work and we sometimes went painting together around Murrumbeena.[45]

The young Bergner did not have a great deal of knowledge about European modernism but he had had access to his father's library in Warsaw. He was acquainted with Post-Impressionism and had seen reproductions of the symbolist and expressionist work of artists such as Edward Munch and Oskar Kokoschka. He saw work in Paris by Daumier, Van Gogh, Cézanne and Rouault.[46] He exerted influence on Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and Noel Counihan as "a consequence of direct personal contact rather than public exposure".[47] Although he painted prolifically he exhibited only intermittently.

> In 1938 and 1939 Bergner sold socks for a Jewish stall-holder in the Victoria Market. There the sight of meths drinkers, beggars, hawkers and the unemployed, scavenging for vegetables around the deserted stalls, cross-connected with the pathetic images of Daumier, Van Gogh and Picasso, and with recollections of life in the Warsaw Ghetto of his youth. [48]

Arthur Boyd responded with great immediacy to Bergner's individual circumstances and also to his approach to painting. The atmosphere in Europe for Jews and the impending disaster of the Second World War was still very remote to Australians in 1938. Bergner was like a genuine prophet of doom in pre-war Australia. At the same time Boyd was profoundly affected by the novels of Dostoievski read aloud by Max Nicholson at Murrumbeena, particularly *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Insulted and the Injured.* His 'new' paintings of 1938 that used portraiture as their basis are in stark contrast to the serious landscapes painted at Rosebud and they have an intensity that the naive, narrative paintings of 1937-1939 do not possess. The heads by Boyd possess the leering intensity of James Ensor's masks but Boyd had not encountered Ensor's work. His reaction was in part due to what Bergner had conveyed was possible in an Expressionistic art but also from a growing empathy for the plight of the dispossessed and deprived and of inner turmoil portrayed in the characters of Dostoevsky.

Franz Philipp acknowledged the change in Boyd's work:

> The manner of painting has also changed: the brushstroke becomes more varied, uneven in ductus and pressure; sweeping and stabbing it creates more violent contrasts of flat and impastoed areas. The opposition of sombre, muddy and violent colours heightens the expression of compulsion and anguish.[49]

As well as *Laughing Head* (1938), and *Three Heads* (1938) **(2.28)**, Boyd did a number of portraits that were significant in their shift from the more naturalistic portraiture of his family in the previous years. The most dramatic example is *Portrait*

of Barbara Hockey (1938) **(2.27)**. Boyd found the subject of illness interesting. This interest could have stemmed from the psychological effect of his own father's epilepsy on himself as an individual and other's perceptions of him.

> Dostoevsky's descriptions of invalids and epileptics and his accounts of extreme emotions extending from murderous hate to saintly love deeply fascinated Arthur. Illness became a new subject of painting. Barbara Hockey while a student at Melbourne University had been confined to bed with tuberculosis. With its emaciated eye sockets, feverish, haggard look and swift impasto brushstrokes, the portrait is the most powerful of those Arthur painted during the late thirties.[50]

The practical dislocation caused by the war was dramatic: compulsory conscription into the army and no studio or normal paint supplies for several years. The period laid the foundation for his life's work since he developed an ability to depict complex ideas with visual alacrity. The shortage of conventional materials encouraged him to experiment with a wide range of media and to realise their full potential.

ENDNOTES CHAPTER ONE

1 Prime Minister of Australia the Hon. Paul Keating MP, "Foreword", in Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd at Bundanon*, Academy Editions, London, 1994, p. 7.

2 Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1967, pp. 19-20.

3 Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd: a Life*, Melbourne University Press, 1988, pp. 17-18.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

9 The finest and most comprehensive study of the family is certainly that by Brenda Niall, *ibid.*

10 Lucy Boyd now lives in England with her 3 children; Jamie Boyd and his wife Elena in London with 5 children; and Polly Boyd lives now with her son in Melbourne.

11 Christopher Tadgell, "Introduction", *Merric Boyd Drawings*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1975; no pagination.

12 *Ibid.*, no pagination.

13 B. Smith, *ibid.*, no pagination.

14 Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

15 Barry Pearce has pointed out to me that Arnold Shore also used palette knife for his landscapes from about 1934, in Melbourne and that there is a resemblance to Boyd's early landscape paintings of the same period. Shore used pinks, greens and yellows in his palette as did William Frater in Melbourne. He says "Post-Impressionism was in the air, and there were several painters roughly on the same wave-length". Letter to author, September, 1999.

16 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 21. See also Martin Boyd *Day of My Delight An Anglo-Australian Memoir*, Melbourne, Landsdowne, 1965, p. 50; and B. Niall, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-3.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[19] PenleighBoyd marriedEdith Anderson, an Australian from Brisbane (10 years his senior) on October 1912 in Paris. The Australian painter Phillips Fox and his wife gave them a wedding reception. They arrived back in Melbourne in March 1913: Penleigh with enough paintings to make up a profitable exhibition in May 1913. He won the Wynne Prize for landscape in 1914. Brenda Niall, *ibid.*, p. 59.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[23] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1993.

[24] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

[25] Clem Christiansen, "Arthur Boyd and the last of the artists' camps: the camp at Cape Schanck", *Broadsheet of the Contemporary Art Society of NSW*, 1963, pp. 17-19.

[26] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7.

[27] Arthur Boyd interview with Grazia Gunn, in Grazia Gunn, *Arthur Boyd, Seven Persistent Images*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1985, p. 19.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[30] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Canberra, 1993, No. 2.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

[34] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, National Gallery of Australia.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[37] "The Westminster Gallery in Little Collins Street, Melbourne was run by a Mr. Fitzgerald. Boyd's paintings were oil paintings; some sell for as much as eight guineas. Patricia McDonald, "Biographical Notes, Arthur Boyd Retrospective", AGNSW, Sydney, 1975, p. 180. Fitzgerald would often display one of Arthur Boyd's paintings in his shop window to attract passers-by, which is how Bergner first encountered Arthur Boyd's work, *ibid.*, p. 180.

[38] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

[39] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, No. 1.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] See Felicity St. John Moore, *Vassilieff and his Art*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1982.

[42] Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[43] Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, Allen Lane, Penguin, Melbourne, 1981, p. 82.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

[45] Arthur Boyd interview with Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[46] Richard Haese, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

[49] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

[50] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

CHAPTER TWO

The War Years

> In a painting I could not make my reaction to the war fit into any generalised theory. I had to make it private. To paint images of destruction and despair for me had to be done in a private way related to my own experience[1]

Arthur Boyd thus describes his reaction as an artist to the Second World War. In a period during which a great debate took place as to the role of art in wartime and that of artists in relation to society, Boyd remained an individual and artist apart. Accordingly his greatest paintings were appropriately created at the very end of the war following a period which had combined intense dislocation and unhappiness. Robert Hughes described the trauma as of being wrenched from the womb into a society with its "hysterias and naked passions".[2] Boyd's dream of innocence came to be irrevocably shattered by these events.

In the late 1930s as we have seen, Boyd's painting had changed dramatically. An expressionist style and the firm conviction that painting could convey passionate feelings and psychological states enabled Boyd to extend his painting from an inherently naturalistic style to one possessing drama and human insight. From 1940 to 1945 Boyd had evolved a group of paintings to which he referred as "imaginary poems . . . psychological or poetic fantasies".[3] In the context of his total *oeuvre*, Boyd's artistic achievements of the 1940s as a whole can be seen to prefigure in meaningand impetus a substantial proportion of the works that were to follow.

The 1940s were a period as a whole within which intensity of feeling, and mental anguish that the artist was compelled to express in his work was handicapped summarily by an acute shortage of art materials. In common with other contemporary painters such as Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, and Noel Counihan, Boyd had learnt to improvise and to experiment with unconventional materials. Above all, and central to

the war years was Boyd's resultant and inevitable reliance upon drawing to express readily the outpourings of images and ideas.

Arthur Boyd was conscripted into the army in May 1941. He was eventually posted to the Army Survey Corps where he met painter John Perceval who was later to marry Boyd's sister Mary. Albert Tucker introduced Boyd and Perceval to the Melbourne Contemporary Art Society. During the war, Boyd was to exhibit with the Contemporary Art Society (and less frequently for a period following the war up until the mid-1950s). The Society in fact contained opposing factions throughout the period. As Bernard Smith wrote:

> Beneath the disagreements lay a fundamental difference concerning the role of the artist in society. The post-impressionists (i.e. the Bell group) abhorred politics in art. But to the Dadaists, expressionists, surrealists and social-realists, artistic revolt possessed psychological, social and political aspects . . .[4]

George Bell (b. 1878) who had been the first President of the Society in 1938 had wanted to restrict the role of non-artist members and to oppose left-wing politics within the Society. However in 1943 further conflict had developed. John Reed, an influential patron of art (and solicitor by profession), became Secretary. Reed was an articulate individual with strong views on art, in marked opposition to those of Bell and his supporters. Franz Philipp was to describe Reed's standpoint as one of "liberal engagement"— a belief that the artist must be unhindered in commenting on his time, freely, in his own personal way, in his own personal language.[5]

In due course a deep rift developed reflecting differing attitudes to the war itself, as well as to the role of art. Two distinct groups now emerged: the social realists and the "Angry Penguins": the social realist artists (Yosl Bergner, Victor O'Connor and Noel Counihan) sought to portray the anguish of the people in a state of war — those in defence of their own country and oppressed by the Nazis and their Japanese allies. The artists surrounding the editors of the *Angry Penguins Journal* (John Reed, Max Harris, Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan and Joy Hester) were primarily interested

in the effects of war on the individual and the artist. They favoured greater individuality and approved the making of work that was informed by knowledge of twentieth century developments in art elsewhere, as in Europe. They considered that adherence to a political ideology would debase their art.

By contrast, for the social realists, the war against Fascism had an overriding importance. This concern, for example, impelled the politically-committed Noel Counihan to approach the watercolourist Harold Herbert, who was a close friend of General Blaney, the Commander of the Australian Military Forces. Counihan now proposed that together, as polar opposites in the local community, he and Herbert issue an appeal to all artists to put aside their differences of aesthetic philosophy, no matter how profound, to come together in the face of the common enemy, Fascism, and to work together on the basis of proposals jointly formulated with the government and the military, in order to maximise the collective skills of the artists for the war effort.[6] For Arthur Boyd, although he greatly admired the commitment of Noel Counihan[7] (to quote specifically) there was no problem of choice. For it was inherent in his nature to stand aside from such a collective effort, essentially as an individual above all else. Characteristically, the social realists committed themselves, with Counihan, to the Artists' Unity Congress, but Albert Tucker, a voice for the Angry Penguins, chose positively to oppose such mutual aims, claiming that such would land artists helplessly in the clutches of wartime bureaucracy. Having actually contributed work to the Contemporary Art Society's 1942 Anti-Fascist Exhibition, the Angry Penguins now opposed the view that in their art they should undertake a prescriptively anti-Fascist stance, asserting that this would represent the antithesis of artistic freedom. Noel Counihan stuck with the opposing belief that the artist was bound by responsibilities to the rest of society, which if pursued would bring benefits to the whole, rather than be constrained by an introspective, subjective attitude, involving private symbolism, for example.[8]

From Arthur Boyd's experience however, the whole exercise from which he abstained conscientiously, nonetheless was to bring direct advantages, as for all artists.

An Artists' Advisory Panel had been subsequently elected by the same Congress; this body negotiated successfully with the authorities specific powers for the transfer of artists already within the armed forces to specialised areas, such as camouflage, cartography, or medical drawing, where specialised skills could be fruitfully deployed. Arthur Boyd came to be transferred to the cartographic department, while Albert Tucker was posted to medical drawing.

As regards the opportunity to exhibit, Boyd was fortunate to be included in the Contemporary Art Society's 1942 (Fourth Annual Exhibition) Melbourne showing at the Athenaeum Gallery, represented by two works, and in the same interstate (Sydney) showing, at the David Jones Gallery.[9] Here he shared space at both locations, with the opposing factions referred to above. As Richard Haese points out:

> What . . . had Nolan's *Dream of a Latrine Sitter*, or Tucker's anguished *Army Shower Room* to do with Counihan's *Tribute to Stalingrad* or *The New Order*? Between them lay deep differences of temperament and values: the differences between symbolism and surrealism on the one hand, and socialism and social realism on the other; between a sense of art as a personal testament and art as a political weapon; between the liberalising force of anarchism and individualism, and the unifying thrust of communism and populism. The differences led to bitter in-fighting and a second split in the Contemporary Art Society in 1944, and became a factor in its eventual demise in Melbourne in 1947. The ultimate result of this conflict was the evolution of a new tradition in Australian art and culture.[10]

To recognise that Arthur Boyd stood apart from these conflicts is not to suggest that he remained uninfluenced by ideas which also fascinated Tucker or Nolan — such Surrealist ideas of free association he found sympathetic, but without feeling any necessity to enter the debate: Boyd's discourse was in his art. Murrumbeena continued to exert a strong influence on Boyd, and it was there, not at the Society, nor even at Heide (the home of John Reed) that Boyd felt comfortable in himself.[11] Remaining both introverted and shy, Boyd "obviously took no part in the battle, for

which he was temperamentally quite unfit: he has throughout his life carefully avoided polemics and artistic partisanships".[12] The paintings by Boyd of the war years, and the Biblical paintings that followed more profusely, when set against the riven Melbourne art world nonetheless both testify to his independent spirit and vindicate thoroughly his originalresponse to war.

After being conscripted into the army in 1941 Boyd was an appropriate candidate for the policy referred to already, of placing artists in "suitable" departments of the army. He was therefore moved to the cartographic warehouse in South Melbourne. Here he confronted a poor industrial part of Melbourne for the second time, the first being when he worked for his uncle Ralph Madder in his paint factory five years earlier in Fitzroy. Both such experiences had an impact on the young artist whose upbringing in the semi-rural suburb of Murrumbeena had been protected from more open poverty of an industrial kind. During the war a particularly strange atmosphere existed there: "People too old or too infirm or disabled for war service assembled on the beach and on the esplanade".[13] Franz Philipp recalls the early war years and the effect of army service on Boyd:

> From 1941 to 1943 Boyd painted very little — less than the other artists of the Angry Penguin circle. . . Gentle, introvert and shy . . . he seems to have suffered from the dull routine of army life even more acutely than his fellow artists in the same position. From the brutal boredom and senseless discipline of army life he found a creative outlet in his drawings, dating from 1941-3 they foreshadow in style and imagery, the series of paintings beginningin late 1942 and growing into the steady productive flow of 1943-44. These were decisive years for Arthur Boyd . . . Artistically, these were years of seminal importance in which he created a range of imagesto which he would return at many stages of his development.[14]

Boyd's recollections of the inspiration for his drawings and paintings have been recorded by numerous authors since. Central to Boyd's imagery is the fact that a number of motifs, and incidents prompted Boyd to draw prolifically. They contained

reference to observed events and individuals on one level and on another his home life and autobiography on another. Boyd recalled:

> These drawings used to be very slight, like notes. I would identify with some of the characters I drew and not with others. I used to see some weird characters walking up and down the beach at South Melbourne. The woman wheeling her paralysed dog by its hind legs, the man running up with a flower trying to ingratiate himself, the child in the woman's arms in *The Baths* (1943) **(3.1)** who sticks her finger in her eye. I would however have felt involved. I sketched them on the spot, these and others — the cripples, the factory girls and the factory chimneys. They were meant to serve as reminders.[15]

In addition he employs a repertoire of Expressionistic and Surreal devices to create dreamlike images and a fantasy world. The strange world created is an allegory for the confused reality of wartime society. Boyd's repetition of certain motifs created a personal vocabulary; he creates a dialogue within his *oeuvre* with his own daily experience and ideas and references from literature, the history of art, classical mythology and Biblical imagery. This was the beginning of a process that would continue to evolve throughout his artistic career.

Although John Perceval was a polio victim and the figure in *Figure on Crutches, Beast and Figure on Bench* (1942-3) **(3.3)**, an amputee, it has been suggested that John Perceval "became the figure on crutches" in this work. The figure on crutches in fact bears such close resemblance to Brueghel's *The Cripples,* (1568) **(10.9)** that it is a reasonable supposition that it was the initial source of inspiration for Boyd.[16]

Carl Cooper was the man in the wheelchair in *Figure in Wheelchair* (1942-3). Both close friends had suffered from polio as children. Both images were used repeatedly by Boyd throughout his career. The haunting *Portrait of Barbara Hockey*,**(2.27)** had in 1938 used the portrayal of an ill friend (she was suffering from tuberculosis) to convey an image of extreme vulnerability. The unease on one hand and the anger and despair on the other precipitated by the war on the young Boyd made

him receptive to the plight of such individuals. As a child he experienced the consequences of his father's epileptic fits; he had been acutely aware of how differently people reacted to his father and to other such unfortunate individuals. He was also aware of the implications of such an illness on the family of the sufferer and on the individual's self-esteem. Boyd recalled that his father produced thousands of drawings on which he wrote things like "I am held" or "held back", indicating that he would not give in to having an attack or fit.[17] When Boyd discovered the novels of Dostoyevsky (who was himself an epileptic) he was able to identify with the suffering of the character who was seized by an epileptic fit. Boyd was so greatly affected by the Russian prose that he was able to make quick drawings. They combined the literary inspiration with his own observations from life. Such a process was developed throughout his career and is a particularly apt approach to his collaborative projects in the 1960s to 1980s with authors and poets. Dostoyevsky's description of an epileptic fit in *The Idiot* bordered on the mystical:

> Then suddenly some gulf seemed to open up before him: a blinding inner light flooded his soul. The moment lasted perhaps half a second, yet he clearly and consciously remembered the beginning, the first sound of the dreadful scream, which burst from his chest of its own accord and which he could have done nothing to suppress. Then his consciousness was instantly extinguished and complete darkness set in.
>
> He had an epileptic fit . . . At that instant the face suddenly becomes horribly distorted, especially the eyes. Spasms and convulsions seize the whole body and the features of the face. A terrible quite incredible scream, which is unlike anything else, breaks from the chest; in that scream everything human seems suddenly to be obliterated, and it is quite impossible, at least very difficult, for an observer to imagine and to admit that it is the man himself who is screaming. One gets the impression that it is someone inside the man who is screaming.[18]

Dostoyevsky evokes the unbearable horror experienced by others upon witnessing a fit and describes the event as "having something mystical about it".[19] At times Boyd saw cripples as metaphors for evil, in the sense that they suffered from having evil inflicted upon them.[20] Where pity and empathy towards the experience of

disabled individuals can be found in much of Boyd's work, there is evident in the manner of his fluid execution of both drawings and paintings — and in his prolific response — a strongly felt need to expunge some form of guilt.[21] On a personal level Boyd had experienced freedom and happiness as an adolescent painter and it was in his nature to admit his good fortune, compared for example, to his friend Yosl Bergner whose personal circumstances were profoundly insecure and distressing. He was also experiencingan entirely safe war compared to his own father's appalling experience of drivingan ambulancein France during the First World War. Merric Boyd was deeply affected by his war experiences, like so many of his generation, for the rest of his life. The irrationality of war and the uneven nature of individuals' differing experiences must have emphasised the role played by chance in life. However, in Boyd's religious upbringing(albeit unorthodox) the question of chance was met with a moral obligation. It was such an obligation that led Boyd to transform his own guilt into an image that would make moral demands of the viewer. Boyd's own work was intended to address suffering and to this end he used guilt felt on a personal level to draw attention to the existence of suffering and injustice in the wider world. This was Boyd's way of condemningthe insanity of war. The works produced in this vein combine a variety of characteristics that display a departure from his early work. They represent a period of the assemblageof ideas. The images created during the war years serve as a testing ground or laboratory for future works. He explored the potential of the drawn image in a variety of media and came to be recognised as one of the most prolific draughtsmen in the history of Australian art.

The ultimate significanceof the war years on the development of Boyd's work cannot be overstated. In the drawings and paintings produced while he was stationed at South Melbourne, the young artist began to develop a repertoire of images that he used repeatedly throughout his carer. Prompted by bizarre events or haunting memories of this period he developed images of Life, Death and Regeneration. He recalledyears later that metamorphosis as a constant theme in his work began during these years.[22]

The condition of metamorphosis is central thematically to the history of European painting. Boyd's interest in it was fuelled as he gained more knowledge of the history of art. When, years later he travelled to Europe and saw the work of the great masters he was able to draw upon classical mythology for his work. During the war years in Melbourne, metamorphosis as a concept was generally discussed in the context of the Surrealist movement. It received impetus from an article written by the French Surrealist André Masson for *Art in Australia*.[23] The article, which appeared in the March 1942 issue was commissioned soon after Masson arrived in America from Europe the previous year. In "Life and Liberty", Masson stated:

> The true artist does not need to know if 'the gods' are dead, or if others are about to be born. His mission is to express the mythical urge, but without 'orders'. Our time is one of metamorphosis. We are living in an extremely disturbed moment of history, and it is not necessary, either, that the painter should conceal the disquietude of his epoch.[24]

Already Boyd had experienced the emancipating effect of authors such as Dostoyevsky whose work demonstrated that his own concept of art could be extended to include the psychological. Boyd's inclination towards an intensely personal response to the war was further strengthened by Masson's acceptance of grotesque imagery, for which he looked to the Old Masters:

> Neither Michelangelo, nor Goya, nor Van Gogh . . . are reassuring. And one might contend that Hieronymus Bosch, with his monsters, his demons, and his shades, expresses his times and his milieu better than certain of his contemporaries who specialise in painting the banalities of life.[25]

Masson's central message was that of artistic freedom. The war in Europe displayed the most vile aspects of the human condition and in Masson's view it was legitimate for the artist to express his or her response to it. The dream was central to the Surrealist movement in France:

> . . . the dream, with all the anxious questions which it poses and tries to solve, is a part of life. The dream, with its cortège of secular images, seeks a representation of our deepest instincts: love, hunger, dread — those instincts which lie at the very root of our being.[26]

The anthropomorphic approach to the depiction of nature of Merric Boyd can be viewed as an introduction to the development in Arthur Boyd's work of a non-Naturalistic approach to painting as well. Arthur Boyd was to an extent influenced by his father's drawings. To attribute a human personality to anything impersonal or irrational, enabled Merric Boyd to transform tree trunks to animals and people. His landscapes, far from being the mere rendering of the natural environment, became images that pulsated with the energy of life in a most primitive but human kind.[27]

In Arthur Boyd's South Melbourne drawings he uses butterflies or dragonflies that are semi-human. His dogs at times become extensions of the human figure. **(3.4)** In addition Boyd's creatures are used for the symbolic significance they denote in a traditional sense. For example, the butterfly symbolises freedom and life and contrasts with smoke which signifies oppression. Both have associations with the war and with the reduced personal liberty experienced in day-to-day life. Smoke recalled the concentration camps and the oppression of the Jews in Europe, however, in Boyd's imagery smoke was used before knowledge of the Holocaust reached Melbourne. It referred instead to a personal experience — that of the dirty smoke produced by his father's kiln that distressed their Murrumbeena neighbours. In *Butterfly Hunter* (1943) a figure emerges from the chimney with its arms extended forming the shape of a crucifix — the traditional symbol of suffering. Boyd is quick to point out: "If it is seen as an analogy to human beings burnt in internment camps, it would only be accidentally prophetic".[28] Boyd's paintings can therefore be viewed on different levels and indeed he enjoys a level of accident in the development of his imagery. He does not hold a doctrinaire approach to the creation of art or its interpretation. For example, the shape of the kite, *The Kite* (1943) **(3.2)**, symbolises freedom but the cross of the sticks also creates a crucifix with which Boyd emphasises suffering more

than the Christian triumph of life over death, which is symbolised by the Crucifixion. The same shape, however, is developed from the shape of a handkerchief from a separate association in 1942.[29] *Figure with Handkerchief and Howling Dog* is based on an individual who performed a strange ritual on the beach in South Melbourne. According to Boyd he was probably suffering a mental disturbance and is therefore used by Boyd to convey the distressing effects of war on individuals:

> I first used the soldier with the trumpet in drawings made in South Melbourne. The first images were of a man who ran along with a handkerchief. He used to stand on the beach holding the handkerchief upright thinking it was a kite. He would also blow a trumpet, absolutely out of control, not playing, just blowing it. He would rush down to the beach and blast on the trumpet, then run along holding up the hanky. Melbourne was full of sinister incidents at that time.[30]

On a personal level Boyd felt the inevitable distaste and contempt for the dislocation caused by the war. He used the army uniform in which he personally felt uncomfortable and awkward, to denote loss of innocence and madness. The soldier's uniform was used in the ink drawing, *Crowned Soldier and Figure with Cudgel* (1942-3). He returned to it in the 1960s when the issue of the Vietnam War[31] prompted further anti-war images. Again in the 1980s, in the *Australian Scapegoat* paintings and the drawings made to illustrate Peter Porter's poems *Mars*, Boyd presents individuals who possess a fragile set of values in a world that has become obsessed with self-aggrandisement and destruction. These themes have been of central importance to Boyd's *oeuvre* since the 1940s.

During the first years of the war the role of landscape diminished in Boyd's drawing and painting. The picture plane became instead a neutral space in which the human figure assumed greater importance. In psychological terms it represented a vacuum but one in which human relationships were tested and intensified. In spiritual terms the empty stage signified a wasteland. In formal terms a framed, empty space enabled the observation of the truth revealed by the artist as seer and prophet.

The figures used included cripples, outsiders and observers, victims of evil and the cruelty of chance. Lovers were used to present images of doomed bliss, based on the reality of normal courtship and love during a war in which hundreds of thousands of young men were brutally killed in defence of their country. To heighten the symbolism Boyd referred to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise. Boyd also included anonymous figures who in the case of *The Hammock* (1944) **(3.6)**, hovered between life and death. Sometimes they represent "the artist" as a commentator on life or the outsider. The coffin is used to symbolise death in a general sense, however, it recalls the event of the death of the artist's grandfather, Arthur Merric Boyd in 1940. The coffin is used again— this time falling from a hearse (making a further reference to James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*)[32] in *The Mining Town* (1946-7) **(4.9)**. The complexity and richness of Boyd's work is achieved by incorporating meaning on various levels, and by weaving literary references with autobiography, traditional symbolism and social comment.

The four paintings: *The Beach*(1944), *The Orchard* (1943), *The Hammock* (1944) and *The Cemetery I* (1944) **(3.6)**, display the importance of the subconscious in Boyd's wartime imagery. André Masson's article "Life and Liberty" had, in 1942, endorsed the use of dream imagery in painting just as the pre-1919 work of Giorgio de Chirico made him the precursor of Surrealist painting. He "soon revealed himself as the painter who seemed destined to illustrate Freud's discovery of the unconscious mind".[33]

Franz Philipp described Boyd's wartime paintings as being "a stage"[34] and in spite of the obvious stylistic differences between Boyd and de Chirico (who made no great technical innovations but painted "faithfully reproduced" scenes[35]) the analysis by Gaeton Picon in his major work *Surrealism 1919-1939*, of de Chirico's world aids the understanding of the alien dreamlike images of Boyd in the early forties.

> They conjure up an alien world in which nothing answers our expectations. Yet even in this pregnant silence voices are divined and these arcaded buildings are haunted by an invisible self. All that we see

> has retained its usual appearance and stands in a three-dimensional space. But, if it is not the end of the world, it is perhaps the end of life: absence and enigma, overlaid by the noise of daily life, stand out clearly in this dreamlike hush.
>
> Beyond everyday appearances, beneath the surface level of the conscious mind, lies the deeper truer world. ("It must not be forgotten" wrote Chirico, "that a picture should always be the reflection of a deeper sensation and that deeper means strange and that strange means not known or quite unknown.") But the descent into that world is tantamount to an absence and a reunion with things divested of their veil of familiarity.[36]

The Baths (*South Melbourne*) (1943) **(3.1)**, *The Seasons* (1944) **(3.6)**, *The Gargoyles* (1944) **(3.8)** and *Kite Flyer, (South Melbourne)* (1943) **(3.9)**, all use the desolate urban landscape as the stage on which to parade a range of curious and bizarre events. The paint is quickly applied (unlike the controlled style of de Chirico) creating both tension and turmoil. During 1944 Boyd's imagery developed quickly with the free association characteristic of the Surrealists. In *The Brown Room* (1943) **(2.29)**, the grave figure of the artist's father sits almost huddled on the small sofa. David Boyd is playing the piano and a child plays with the family dog, Peter. The atmosphere is strange and intense.

Peter Herbst recalled life there and the position of Merric Boyd in "At Open Country Cottage in the 1940s":

> By 1942 Merric Boyd was an ageing invalid. His condition due to epilepsy and his attacks were an accepted facet of life. His talk consisted mainly of simple and personal maxims of piety. The children disregarded his refrains without inflicting hurt. He sat in his high armchair by the fire and made little drawings in crayon on odd scraps of paper. These were the predecessors of others more perfectly executed which are now much prized and admired. They speak of an authentic and inward love for all things in God's creation. They recognise the power and the integrity of the object. Merric expressed what he professed . . . Merric at that time was one of the most unworldly people I have ever met. It did not occur to him to give a thought to advantage or reputation. At the same time one did have the impression that he was not as simple as he gave himself out to be. He kept many things about himself hidden.[37]

The following year Boyd took the figure of his father as portrayed in *The Brown Room* and placed him on a throne where he became *The King* (1944) **(3.5)**. Beneath the figure of the enthroned king is a hellish scene of groping figures rolling towards an abyss. This is a seminal painting for on close examination one can recognise links with previous paintings: the South Melbourne man with the trumpet, Peter the dog, a bird-man. Past and present, mundane and mystical merge together. A "compulsive strangeness and uncanniness"[38] combine with the juxtaposition of images from different aspects of the artist's experience predate the Biblical paintings of 1946-7 which are unsurpassed in their rich iconography and meaning.

In the same year as *The King* **(3.5)** was painted, Boyd made drawings and paintings in the bushland near Melbourne. His portrayal of the bush displays a radical departure from the 1930s *plein air* paintings which are by comparison, innocent in their world view. *The Hunter* paintings **(9.3)** such as *Figures by a creek*, 1944 **(3.12)** and *Landscape (Bacchus March)*, 1942 **(9.2)** paintings depict the Australian bush as hostile and menacing, recalling the description made in 1880 by Marcus Clarke:

> In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness. Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphs of haggard gum trees blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds.[39]

The paint is applied in a crude manner. The figure is both the hunter and the hunted. Gunn describes the hunter as:

> A fictitious character, the solitary hunter lives in the Victorian bush and is at one with nature. He has not been corrupted by materialism but retains a certain innocence as he roams the bush, the Australian counterpart of the wild man of the woods of European folklore.[40]

The hunter paintings set in the Australian bush mark a departure from the urban paintings done by Boyd during the years spent in the army. The paintings that followed in 1946-7 draw together many of the strands established during the war years.

The Biblical paintings are unsurpassed in Boyd's *oeuvre* and are masterpieces of twentieth century painting in Australia and in a broader international context.

ENDNOTES CHAPTERTWO:

1 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Grazia Gunn, quoted in *Arthur Boyd, Seven Persistent Images*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1985, p. 31.

2 Robert Hughes, "Nolan and Boyd", *Nation*, 4 April, 1964.

3 Arthur Boyd, "Biographical Note" written for John Hetherington, author of *Australian Painters, Forty Profiles*(Cheshire, Melbourne, 1963). Material not used by Hetherington was used by Franz Philipp and referred to as above. Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1967, p. 31.

4 Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788-1970*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 221.

5 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

6 Noel Counihan, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Melbourne, 1985.

7 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, NGA, Canberra, 1993.

8 Janet McKenzie, *Noel Counihan*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1986, p. 11.

9 Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan, Artist and Revolutionary*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 165-170.

10 Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors, The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* Allen Lane, Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1981, p. 97

11 Conversation between Janet McKenzie and Peter Herbst, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981. See Janet McKenzie, *Labour History*,

12 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

13 Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, André Deutsch, 1986, p. 38.

14 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

15 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Grazia Gunn, *Seven Persistent Images, op. cit.*, p. 31.

16 The figure subject of the cripple is first documented in the Tadgell Catalogue of Drawings, Nos. 114 and 115 (Drawings, 1941-1943, Murrumbeena and South Melbourne). It is a reasonable supposition that the figure of the Cripple in Brueghel's painting was a source of inspiration. Philipp hints as such, and refers in a footnote to that most famous painting, *The Cripples* **(10.9)** (Paris, Louvre, 1618), Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, Chapter III, Footnote 2, p. 138. This sourcing by Boyd, from reproductions, is not to be confused with the inspiration for the cripple in the painting *The Gargoyles* (1944) **(3.8)**, which as distinct from that in *The Seasons* (1944) **(3.6)**, Ursula Hoff finds similar in features to John Perceval, Boyd's brother-in-law, a polio victim. Both Philipp and Hoff refer only principally to Brueghel as an admitted source in Boyd for changes in technique. A change in composition is the high horizon line but, not the adoption of powerful universal motifs such as the cripples. Nor does Gunn, *Seven Persistent Images* (1985), although specifically concerned in that work with "identifying the sources of Boyd's constant imagery" (Mollison, "Introduction") in recognising "the Cripples" as one of the seven key persistent images, consider the source for this imagery in Brueghel's reproductions in books familiar to Boyd from 1942 in the

Art Room of the National Library, Melbourne, notwithstanding that *Figure on crutches, beast and figure on bench* (1942-3) **(3.3)**, is given to be a "memory image of John Perceval" (Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 31). But this figure is an amputee, with a 'stump' leg, unlike Perceval, identical to the Brueghel figure type.

There are further strong similarities, as between the "persistent image" of the outstretched figure attributed by Gunn as inspired by the sight of Boyd's father's condition following an epileptic fit (*ibid.*, p. 32) for example, in the charcoal drawing, *Corpse, dog and hansom cab in an industrial street* (c.1947) **(3.14)**, and the outstretched figures in the Brueghel painting *The Land of Cockaigne* (1568) **(10.8)**. Although Boyd worked autobiographical experience into these images, such similarities are too close, in art historical terms, to be deemed purely coincidental, and in terms of current attributive convention it is surely both creditable and appropriate for the artist's real historical source in the work of Brueghel both in imagery and composition as well as in technique, to be fairly recognised as such.

17 Arthur Boyd (1993) quoted by Barry Pearce, "Introduction", *Arthur Boyd Retrospective*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993, p. 30.

18 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, The Folio Society edition, London, 1971. Translated with an Introduction by David Magarshack (1955), p. 271. I have preferred here, after examining varied twentieth century translations of Dostoyevsky's great novel, that by David Magarshack, as opposed to the official Soviet translation quoted by Grazia Gunn (translated Julius Katzer, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971) which is somewhat inferior. Informed opinion suggests it fails to reflect the true description and literary force of the original Russian prose, where the key characteristics concerning the affliction of epilepsy are most effectively expressed and in terms readily comprehensible to anyone familiar with the condition from immediate experience.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 272.

20 Arthur Boyd, quoted by Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

22 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990. See Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

23 André Masson, "Life and Liberty", *Art in Australia*, A Sydney Morning Herald Publication, Sydney, March, 1942, pp. 11-17.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

27 See Christopher Tadgell, "Introduction", *Merric Boyd Drawings*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1975.

28 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

29 Grazia Gunn makes this point, *ibid.*, p. 34.

30 Arthur Boyd, *ibid.*, p. 24.

31 Living in London at the time the Boyds were faced with the dilemma that if they returned home to Australia their son Jamie would be conscripted into the army to fight in the Vietnam war.

32 Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990.

33 Gaetan Picon, *Surrealism 1919-1939*, Skira, Geneva, 1977, p. 52.

34 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

35 Gaetan Picon, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[37] Peter Herbst, "At Open Country Cottage in the 1940s", *The Art of the Boyds, Generations of Artistic Achievement*(Patricia Dobrez and Peter Herbst), Bay Books, Sydney, 1990, p. 199.

[38] Gaetan Picon, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[39] Marcus Clarke, *Australian Tales*, Melbourne, 1896, pp. 1-2. Discussed by Manning Clark in*A History of Australia*, Vol. IV, 1851-1888, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 312-3.

[40] Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

CHAPTER THREE

Post War

The two decades between the Great Depression and the Cold War were described by Richard Haese in 1981 as "years of unparalleled intellectual and artistic ferment". In his study *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art*, he made the first comprehensive study of the period, since Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting, 1788-1970* (1st ed. 1962). Since then other authors have made considerable contributions to an understanding of this period by way of artists's monographs and exhibitions. In the context of a study of Arthur Boyd, Haese describes the social and cultural *milieu* in which artists trained and practised. He makes a significant contribution to the study of individual artists who include: Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker, John Perceval, Yosl Bergner, Noel Counihan, Russell Drysdale and others. His work also explores the areas of patronage and criticism.

> The artists and the circumstances in which their works were produced are as remarkable as the images themselves. Artists and writers lived together, talked, argued and exchanged ideas on levels and in ways that have few parallels. In part this communalism was necessitated by the actively hostile or uncomprehendingly indifferent world in which radicals found themselves in the 1930s and 1940s. It was also, however, a part of the new social values that seemed indissolubly linked with the character of their art. As artists they were also highly articulate. It was this degree of political and intellectual self-awareness and ability to communicate with force and insight in both words and paint that ultimately produced a revolution in Australia's cultural life.[1]

Bernard Smith's analysis of the period in which he himself played an influential role, is still perhaps the most astute:

> Australian society discovered contemporary art just when it had to face the challenge of war. The unusual degree of vitality which emerged is a clear indication of the vitality of the nation when forced to rely on its own resources. By 1947, however, with the war over and the battle for the recognition of contemporary art won, there are indications of a slackening of the ebullient vitality of the war years. Peace, and the acceptance of the contemporary idiom in art, brought its own problems.

> After years of comparative isolation, most practising artists wanted to get away to Europe .....
>
> Peace, too, brought a marked change from the expressive extroversion of the war years. Art became, in the hands of the most creative, a more private matter, concerned far more with the individual than with society. Many were drawn to religion and became fascinated by medieval styles of one kind or another; others, like Nolan and Boyd - black swans upon alien waters - sought identification by turning to myths and legends which had already for many years provided Australian society with a sense of its own independence among the nations.[2]

Biblical Paintings, Grange Frescoes

To his immense relief, Arthur Boyd was finally discharged from the army in 1944. This remained however, an emotionally tense time and indeed he was to experience something of a personal crisis. He felt that his South Melbourne paintings could no longer suffice for his part, in the expression of moral outrage generally felt throughout Australia towards the enveloping war situation. The newspapers of May and June 1944 now brought descriptions of ethnic concentration camps in Poland; by the end of the following May (1945) fresh newsreels from Buchenwald and Belsen were on release at newsreel theatres in Melbourne[3]. Now the full horror of the Nazi holocaust in Europe was revealed, and as a painter Boyd felt absolutely compelled to find a different and more universally significant structure and method to express the widespread shock at these events.

Philosophical discussions on the problems of evil as perpetrated in the war took place[4]. Boyd's recently befriended Jewish friends were important in the development of his career. The Boyd family provided a welcome retreat for a number of Jewish intellectuals during and after the war. It is significant that it was Jewish friends such as Gerd and Hans Buchdahl who bought some of the most challenging, early paintings

in the 1940s; Peter Herbst later purchased two of the *Bride* paintings. Boyd's first biographer, Franz Philipp, a Jewish academic from Vienna was greatly influenced in his admiration for Boyd's painting, by the manner in which the Boyd family identified with the plight of the dispossessed Jews in Europe. Philipp himself owned *Abraham and the Angels*, (1946), and later in London Tom Rosenthal who championed Boyd's work acquired *The Expulsion*, (1947-8) **(4.11)**. Arthur Boyd felt it a great privilege to be admired and encouraged by individuals of culture and learning such as those who arrived in Melbourne in the late thirties and early forties. Their support of him as a young artist increased his commitment; the fact that they were prepared to buy his works was also an incentive to continue in his work inspired by the Old Masters, although in the case of Philipp and Rosenthal, Boyd gave paintings in return for their writing and publishing efforts. Arthur Boyd's gentle manner and passionate commitment to an Old Testament language, a language redolent of a European culture which the displaced refugees had been forced to relinquish in order to survive the Fascist threat, provided hope in a country itself devoid of the rich cultural heritage of Europe. To these displaced individuals, Arthur Boyd was an artist with inherent potential whom they wanted to influence and nurture.

The Boyds were not alone in the artist community of Victoria in their support of the Jewish plight in Europe or in Australia. In particular, Noel Counihan the painter in Melbourne was also passionately committed to the plight of the Jews and through his friendship with Yosl Bergner and Judah Waten, developed new awareness in the advocacy of free speech, and the causes and victims of poverty and injustice. Noel Counihan's radical and outspoken stand on the role of art in wartime society led to

him being marginalised by other artists and critics. His lifelong membership of the Communist Party of Australia led to personal acrimony and to a politically-motivated rejection of his work. Bernard Smith's biography, *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* (1993) gives a fine account of this early period and uses documents that have previously not been published. However, between 1983 and 1985 I myself had personally carried out interviews with Counihan and in due course published a monograph, on Counihan's work (1986)[5]. Providentially, Arthur Boyd's admiration for this work on Counihan led subsequently to his inviting me in 1990 to develop this major study of his own work. In my interviews with Boyd, our mutual admiration for and respective friendships with Counihan had led to discussions of a political nature that were outside the experience of other historians of Boyd. Indeed Franz Philipp and Ursula Hoff writing in the 1960s and 1980s had respectively surmised that Boyd was never political in his outlook at all, and yet they cannot be criticised for believing that to be so[6]. It is important to note, for example that Boyd's first exhibition in 1941 was not simply with Yosl Bergner (as stated by Philipp) but together with Bergner and the active Communist Party member, Counihan. In Bernard Smith's biography of Counihan[7] he uncovers previously ignored inconsistencies and omissions in the impact of socio-political affiliations by artists of this early period. Of importance in the Boyd context is the subject of this, Boyd's first exhibition. Seen in the context of numerous well-documented letters and articles written by Counihan, and in the light of Boyd's friendship and respect for Counihan's courageous political stance as an artist, (albeit not expressed openly to his biographer in the 1960s) it is now possible in reappraising Boyd at this point in time, to claim that although he was

both reserved politically and inactive as such, being uninvolved in party politics of any kind, his own radical social and humanitarian standpoint nonetheless duly informed his art. Bernard Smith has re-analysed in detail the new mood in Boyd's work which he personally experienced in this 1941 exhibition with Bergner and Counihan.

> Boyd, with Bergner, had visited Counihan when he was still at Greswell Hospital [Counihan was suffering from tuberculosis]. Boyd had met Bergner four years earlier, in 1937, when he had held his first exhibition at the Westminster Gallery, Little Collins Street, Melbourne, where he had shown naturalistic landscapes mostly of the Mornington Peninsula. It was Bergner, as Boyd himself recalled later, who directed his interest away from naturalistic landscape towards an expressive realism more concerned with human beings and violent circumstances increasingly confronting them. Bergner as a Jewish refugee from persecution in Europe, is the influence behind Boyd's early 'expressionistic' portraits. Bergner was the first European refugee artist Arthur Boyd met. He was, as Boyd himself said, also the first important influence and critic of his work[8].

In fact Haese too, is correct in this matter : "One critic dismissed the work of Boyd and Counihan out of hand but found that in 'Bergner's work there is a broad pity and sympathy for mankind that is worthy of his artistic talent'"[9].

Smith firmly considers that the deliberate omission of the crucial social factor that Boyd exhibited jointly with Counihan at this stage is more significant than has otherwise been given credence:

> The date of this exhibition was given incorrectly in Franz Philipp's *Arthur Boyd* and has been followed by most writers who have written on Boyd ever since. The confusion probably arose from the fact that the two reviews of the exhibition pasted onto Yosl Bergner's book of newspaper cuttings are dated (incorrectly) in pencil '1939'. It is perhaps not without significance that Philipp does not mention that Counihan as well as Bergner participated in the Rowden White Library exhibition. The mistake has important implications for any account of the development of Arthur's style[10].

The fact that the friendship between Boyd and Counihan was not properly acknowledged by Philipp has since given rise to the interpretation of Boyd's work, in the 1940s, as being almost exclusively inspired by the Old Testament and the Old Masters. It is my contention, however, that Arthur Boyd's impulse for these extraordinary paintings done in the immediate post-war period, was indeed intentionally both political and moral. Such a combination of the two might appear contradictory, in the Australian context at that time, but it was precisely because Boyd was so enraged and distressed by the war that he made such profound images. The anger I refer to here is quite distinct from that to which Haese refers in his discussion of the social backgrounds of the artists (Tucker, Counihan, O'Connor): "That Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd were products of a more *laissez-aller* social ambience is reflected in the refusal of both to share the anger of their friends"[41]. On the contrary, Boyd's anger was categorically of a moral kind and while he did not share the volatile, politically engaged personality of Counihan or his penchant for demonstrations, he respected and admired Counihan's impulse to protest. Arthur Boyd as an individual, reserved as always, avoided conflict to the point of concealment. Later on in the 1960s he would not have felt comfortable with being aligned to his card-carrying communist friends. Like so many artists and critics, Counihan's politics were too extreme for comfort. By the time I interviewed Boyd, Counihan was dead and his vision vindicated. Boyd's respect for Counihan, documented in discussions with me was perhaps coloured in retrospect, by the knowledge that he had not admitted or expressed his true respect for Counihan earlier; he was putting the record straight. In other words, he was at last and in full conscience

putting the incomplete historical facts straight for posterity while he still had time. It is interesting to note that it was not Franz Philipp (or Ursula Hoff and Tom Rosenthal later) who observed the apparent clash of motives in Arthur's work, but his uncle Martin Boyd who was troubled by his nephew's juxtaposition of left-wing politics and the Old Testament; "The Communists would damn you!"[12]

To recognise Boyd's political motivation in the early work which Philipp and Hoff have notably failed to do, enables the proper art historical process to be completed in a career that, in terms of his complete *oeuvre* is otherwise dislocated and inadequately explained. Notwithstanding, Philipp appears to have been very much against a political interpretation of Boyd's work, as if any alliance with or even tolerance of the Social Realist artists, would in the Melbourne critical context, devalue Boyd's apparent achievement in broader cultural terms. The fact is apparent, then and now, that Boyd's work was not in any way Social Realist, in the manner of Counihan, but it did reveal clear sympathy with the plight of the underprivileged victim in society, expressed in a similar way to Yosl Bergner. A political message is fully implied not overtly emphasised. This attitude aligns accordingly with a wider distrust and fear at the time of the detrimental effect of left-wing politics on art, evidenced in Richard Haese's study of this period[13].

Boyd was of a generous disposition and naturally tolerant and generous towards other artists and his respect for the primacy of the creative act *per se* prevented him from going so far as to dismiss another possibly socially less well-favoured artist in his own endeavour, however divergent in intention from his own work. Furthermore, it is relevant that in all his letters to Franz Philipp during the 1960s (now in the Franz

Philipp Papers at the University of Melbourne), there is no mention whatever of Noel Counihan. In the 1960s Boyd was in fact very ambitious in terms of his own career. He was not able to be involved in the wartime debate between the Angry Penguins and the SocialRealists; Boyd viewed both sides each to be equally legitimate responses to an abhorrent situation. "Truth to self" was for Arthur Boyd, vital in any artistic endeavour[14]. Boyd still valued the community of his artist friends and indeed at the end of the war commented on the vacuum created by the exodus of artists and writers, mostly to Europe[15] in a letter to Albert Tucker: "I never see anybody these days. People just aren't sociable here anymore. There are no good painters here. I think that to do good work you have to be among good painters."

In my interviews with Noel Counihan (1983-1985) he was keen to correct the misconception that he believed had been put forward in *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (1981) by Richard Haese. It was Counihan's clear view that this revealed deficient knowledge of left-wing theory. Haese claimed that Counihan's views on art, were formed in the main part by Karl Marx. While broader issues of society (for example the equality of women) were indeed formed for Counihan by the writings of Marx, Counihan specifically pointed out that on the subject of art and culture, it was Nicholai Bucharin who most profoundly moulded his views. In Haese's book there is no mention of Bucharin (whose ideas were less programmatic that Marx), and when I spoke to Haese (1981)[16] he admitted to not having heard of Nicholai Bucharin. Also symptomatic of Philipp's tendency to play down the political dimension in Boyd's art and his commitment to social change as an individual, is the fact that when TSR Boase sent his Introduction in draft for

Philipp's monograph, Philipp rejected it on the grounds that it showed too great an enthusiasm for the Antipodean Manifesto of 1959[17]. There is no copy of this in the Boase papers at Magdalen College Oxford or in the Franz Philipp papers at the University of Melbourne. Bernard Smith, however, kept a copy. In full awareness of my close research on Counihan and my published appreciation of his work, Boyd was candid to me in these later interviews, emphasising always his own respect and life-long friendship with Counihan. Nevertheless, no other author on Boyd, in any interview hitherto has ever since broached the subject of Counihan's own role, (since Philipp had authoritatively and for his own reasons, excluded Counihan as friend and influence, predictably this was never deemed relevant) and so, regrettably, to date prior to this there has been no proper appreciation of this clear political dimension to Boyd's early work[18].

In style and context the post-war paintings by Arthur Boyd were hauntingly profound biblical images dramatically juxtaposed onto a contemporary Australian backdrop. Their theatricality and spiritual aspirations should not however, mask an integral individual political standpoint of conscience that was a major force in Boyd's artistic career. Only by recognising the real influence of the political *milieu* in which these artists were developing as younger artists, and the specific influence of those individuals who were prepared to be outspoken, is it possible in art historical terms to unify Boyd's career. The collaborative projects with Peter Porter in the seventies and eighties (*Jonah, Narcissus, The Lady and the Unicorn* and *Mars*, for example), possess an explicit political tone. In the light of my new research it is possible for the first time to understand these works in more depth and to cross-

reference them in iconographic terms. In a key interview with me in 1993 at the National Gallery of Australia, Boyd specifically admitted that his *Caged Painter* paintings of 1972, constituted a parallel protest and reference to the infamous episode in 1932 when Counihan locked himself in an actual cage which was then chained to the back of a truck in Sydney Road, Melbourne, (thus avoiding arrest) from where he spoke publicly on the individual human right to free speech. The practice by which Franz Philipp avoided the political considerations in Boyd's work, which remained a factor until his death, persists by others. There grew furthermore a tendency by critics to overlook that Boyd had as an artist needed the outside stimulus of other artists and the collaboration of particular writers as he progressed; so as to facilitate the artist's own advance along what was characteristically an independent path.

The Editorial of *Angry Penguins* (No.7) in 1945 acknowledged the end of the European war with the observation that it had "left behind a faint hope, deeply tinged with cynicism and marked by a profound despair"[19]. In spite of this, as Haese points out, Nolan, Tucker and Boyd came to produce many of their most outstanding paintings between 1945 and 1947. Yet all were lacking the political force of the work of their contemporary Noel Counihan. Post-war Australia was ironically a less promising world for the production of art and ideas than wartime had ever been. With hindsight it is possible nonetheless to clarify new directions in certain individual careers. According to Haese, the end of the war saw a marked change from personalised images towards, "more explicit comments on Australian society and the Australian experience. The artists who moved furthest from the earlier preoccupations were Arthur Boyd and John Perceval. Towards the end of 1944, there was an

increasingawareness, in Boyd's work particularly, of the tensions and dislocations of the war. Whereas earlier these were oblique references, now there was a sense of war as human tragedy on an incomprehensible scale'[20].

Boyd was keenly interested in the work of sixteenth century Flemish artist Pieter Brueghel during the war years (among other Masters) but it was not until 1945 that his interest became highly pronounced and was turned to good effect in his paintings. He and John Perceval studied both the work of Brueghel and that of Hieronymous Bosch in the State Library of Victoria. Through familiarity with such works, Boyd was inspired to make free use of apparently innumerable figures, of a type that frequently appeared, creating in the same way a virtual sea of bodies in heaving, violent motion. In the earlier South Melbourne paintings Boyd had concentrated primarily on the plight of the individual, especially those whom he perceived to be either victims or outcasts. He was deeply aware of the effects of trauma and dislocation upon the individual psyche. The victims of such effects he placed in a de Chirico-like space - an urban wasteland usually - which strongly resembled a stage. Boyd's subsequent dissatisfaction with this treatment, in 1944, appears then to have been prompted by the realisation of the sheer scale and magnitude of suffering during the war, that of individuals as such still, but then translated into an unimaginable scale, beyond all comprehension. Boyd now sought not only to make allusion to man or woman in a world possessed, but to all of mankind. Taking a bird's-eye view, as with Brueghel, Boyd was able to confer universal significance: in *The Mockers* (1945) **(4.1)**, Boyd used such a language of the Bible, and created a truly great image of humanity in a senseless plight in the final year of the Second World War. *The*

Mockers is "an image of the world possessed, containing elements of the psychological as well as the biblical, along with the essence of contemporary life"[21]. Boyd explained this aspect in detail to the critic Peter Fuller:

> That one was the first. It had Port Phillip in the back and took a bird's-eye panorama. You had the lovers who were playing cards and falling into the pit on the right-hand side: they were falling down into hell, or maybe they were pushed in. And God was sitting up and turning his back on them. There is the sense of a general moral message. It's not even a moral really; it's more like coming across a situation which is the world. There is the immorality of God just turning his back, but he is not looking down at anyone doing anything: he's looking out, and all the terrible things that people do to one another are going on around him. The picture combines birth, copulation and death. Paintings can exist and they don't need to have any reason: you can't describe a morality[22].

Feelings ran high in the Jewish population in Melbourne. A combination of shock and moral outrage swept the Jewish intellectual community in the city at this time; they seemed to themselves to be so physically remote from the horror that they may well have posed over and over that question asked so many years later by George Steiner, "Why have we been spared?"[23]. Boyd was increasingly driven now by feelings of guilt and impotence in the face of such insane atrocity, to create what are claimed to be the most dramatic, mythic masterpieces in the history of Australian painting.

The Mourners (1945) **(4.2)**, was effectively a pair for *The Mockers*. Painted in the same year, it was not in fact a Christian lamentation but constituted a second crucifixion. In his usual way, Boyd does not here adhere to the traditional art-historical form in his Biblical images; instead the Christ figure is completely naked, thus intensifying the cruelty and humiliation inflicted upon him. In addition, in *The Mourners*, there is no particular area represented by the good, that is by the inclusion

in the picture of Christ's disciples: only his persecutors are included. The panoramic effect created by *The Mockers* is now abandoned for a more severely frontal aspect, so intensifying the viewer's focus on the suffering of Christ himself.

The paintings that followed were, in a more direct sense "Biblical" paintings than were these first mythic works. Less intense and symbolic than *The Mockers* and *The Mourners*, these subsequent works were larger in scale, produced systematically, and at a slower pace than most of the previous work. By now, Boyd was working during the day in the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery (discussed later in this chapter) and painting by night. The knowledge acquired from his study of Brueghel now opened up new visual possibilities. He was able to create more complex visual dramas with a greater calm and humanity than previously displayed. Boyd's debt to Rembrandt is clearly apparent in paintings such as *Saul and David* (c.1946) **(4.3)** It was important for Boyd that the National Gallery of Victoria contained no fewer than three Rembrandts, including a late self-portrait, though his knowledge was largely derived otherwise from reproductions[24]. Boyd repeatedly studied the *Self-Portrait* **(10.19)** by Rembrandt on numerous visits to the National Gallery of Victoria together with Blake's illustrations of *Dante* **(10.1)** which were first on show there in the early 1940s. Rembrandt's figures have a monumentality and patriarchal quality that directly appealed to Boyd. In a number of the Biblical paintings for example, *Saul and David*, Boyd combines conflicting responses harmoniously:

> The mood of musical languor and doom, the tragic inevitability of fate is expressed with great poignancy in a composition (the most firmly woven in Boyd's early work) in which physical closeness and spiritual isolation contrast tensely.[25]

There is a remarkable maturity evident in Boyd's paintings of this time which reflects very well the ethical high-mindedness and respect maintained between the members of his own family[26]. Boyd's highly ascetic upbringing allowed him both a rare psychological insight and a spiritual depth when it came to such artistic pursuits as were then followed through, given his young age and limited experience of life. In Brueghel, Bosch and Rembrandt, Boyd found, in endless supply, a plethora of images of dramatic and fantastic intensity in visual and metaphysical quality. Brueghel's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1556),[27] a bizarre, "surreal" drama and *Big Fish Eats Little Fish*[28] **(10.6)** of the same year, a debauched and vile scene of the destruction of all order and civilisation interested Boyd, and indeed such works themselves display affinities with Bosch.[29] For Boyd the latter painting could have prompted later images of Jonah; the spewed fish, the violent attacks by men and the individuals seemingly turning their backs on the appalling realities before them. These elements were for Boyd all admissible in his new schema. Indeed they displayed in the hand of an older master, precisely the very personally characteristic visual language he needed in order to channel and focus his acute revulsion against the European holocaust. The fabulous allegories that were created by early European masters now gave to Boyd the assurance that he could himself express such complex ideas and powerful emotions with visual alacrity.

Typically with Boyd, the powerful spirituality of Rembrandt is expressed strongly in *Abraham and the Angels*, each painting marks an advance in technical terms. Appropriately, the light source in the Annunciation scene seems to glow mysteriously. As well a studying Old Master paintings in reproduction, Boyd had

available the further inspiration of the book by Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting*[30] to which he had been introduced at that time by his fellow artist in Melbourne, Albert Tucker. In such conditions of war, Boyd and fellow artists made great play in experimenting with the varied techniques of their craft. At that time, artists in Australia, as elsewhere, were of necessity forced to improvise greatly with such materials as were available while the shortages persisted of quality paint and traditional materials.

Boyd also now became interested in the work of Jacopo Tintoretto, whose influence may be traced in *The Baptism* (1946-47). However, and significantly, the subject is an episode drawn by Boyd from the Acts of the Apostles, and not as was the case with Tintoretto, a purely Venetian event.

In *The Baptism* (*of the Ethiopian Chamberlain*) (1946-47), Boyd combines technical influences from both Rembrandt (monumental figures) and Tintoretto (fluid paint application, composition). More significantly the work is a dramatic example of Boyd's juxtaposition of Old Master elements on the Australian landscape. In the background is a flooded river; animals are caught and figures attempt to make the crossing. Boyd himself believed that in this work both imagery and meaning become more open and accessible. The figures have a rounded monumentality — their brooding silence provides a model for a wide range of human tribulation — it becomes an allegory for human struggle.

The Prodigal Son (1946-47) **(4.5)** (oil and tempera on cassein ground on canvas), was the first of several paintings done by Boyd on this New Testament theme.[31] Pictorially the subject from Luke Chapter 15 is open to numerous interpretations

from the images of the foolish younger son who squandered his property on loose living and when faced with famine and the threat of starvation was forced to live with swine. In this work Boyd portrayed the desperate plight of the son desolate amidst decay and filth. He discovers a flower (the symbol of rebirth) and hence the angel, messenger of God's will, appears telling the son to return home. In a subsequent painting as part of the Grange murals he illustrates the essential messages of the parable: that of paternal divine love, contrition and forgiveness.[32]

Boyd's identification with the story of the Prodigal Son possibly paved the way for the compassionate images of his own father (*The Potter* series) and of father-son relationships *per se*, for example, in the *St. Francis of Assisi* cycle (*St. Francis Beaten by his Father*) **(7.7)**. Again, in the 1980s he returned to the story of the Prodigal Son in his Shoalhaven River paintings. While the clothing in Boyd's paintings of the 1940s on this subject (loose long coloured robes) is historical, the landscape is Australian and the ambience contemporary. There is a strong suggestion of the theatrical. Boyd claims that he was not using painting as an instructive tool as such nor was he trying to impart a particular religious line but that his aim at this time was to transmit visually, ideas of a compassionate and more general significance.

Three paintings of 1946-1947 pursue further the biblical theme, in the Old Testament story of Moses. Painted after the war and at a relatively stable and contented stage in Boyd's life (a wider circle of friends, marriage, freedom from army life) they are positive and confident paintings.

The Golden Calf (1946) **(4.6)**, tells the story of how Moses, in the third month after the children of Israel had left Egypt, arrived in the desert of Sinai where he

established a camp. Moses went up Mount Sinai to talk to God. God set down the Ten Commandments. One of God's wishes was that the Israelites should have no other gods. The people agreed that "everything the Lord has said, we will do".[33] God called to Moses to go to him up the mountain and there he went and stayed for forty days and forty nights. When God had finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai he gave him two tables of stone, the Tables of the Law and Commandments. But as Moses was gone the people became restless, not knowing what had become of him. Led by Aaron they all put forward their gold jewellery and melted it and modelled it into the shape of a calf, so worshipping it as a god.[34] *Moses Throwing Down the Tables of the Law* (1946) **(4.7)**, is Boyd's interpretation of when Moses came back down from Mount Sinai and discovered the irreverent celebrations. He threw down the Tables of the Law in anger and despair.

> As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing. Moses' anger burnt hot, and he threw the tables out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it upon the water, and made the people of Israel drink it.[35]

Moses Leading the People (1947) **(4.8)** refers to the subsequent biblical passage in Exodus where Moses stood by the gate of the camp and demanded "Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me".[36] The sons of Levi gathered together and on the instruction of Moses slayed all those who would not state their allegiance to God. Then Moses went back to God to atone for the sins of the people, and God instructed Moses to lead the people to the promised land with his angel before them.

Boyd does not aim to tell the story in an accurate or precise manner. For example, the plague that God sent to punish Aaron and the people for building the Golden Calf

is not evident even though it could have been a dramatic image in visual terms.[37] Also absent is the massacre of the 3,000 men by the sons of Levi, which followed in the scriptures Moses' throwing down of the Tables of the Law.[38] This might have provided a scene of wartime mass killing. Boyd's violence is of a different kind, seemingly rather more a form of psychological violence. In the face of many of his figures there is a great fear and there is here a focus on the pandemonium of human folly rather than actual violent death or damnation. Chaos predominates and in the copulating figures who clutch one another desperately one feels there is a powerful desire to escape reality. There is here an autobiographical element relating to Boyd's overwhelming wartime urge to escape all of the mundane aspects of war and reflecting too the reduced personal freedom in army life.

Boyd made many A3 equivalent size drawings to accompany these biblical works. Unfortunately they were often put on the studio floor in the process of painting and were damaged and destroyed.[39] He used many previous drawings of family and friends **(4.26,4.27,4.28,4.29,4.30)** (done during the war whilst in the army) to supply information for figures.

The Mining Town (*Casting the Money-lenders from the Temple*) **(4.9)** is set in a rural Australian landscape with the city of Melbourne and Port Phillip Bay in the background. It resembles Brueghel's atmosphere of the carnival where the minutiae of life dominate. A rich image of human life is constructed on numerous levels ranging from the mundane to the profound. Visually a stimulating image, full of movement and metaphor, Boyd includes a repertoire of now familiar images and observed incidents: the innocence of youth is portrayed in the upper left corner by a

Murrumbeena-like landscape of grazing cows and tranquil pastures. The upper right area contains the Bay with the Port Melbourne lighthouse as an identifiable landmark. Technically the perspective of the bayside houses was challenging for Boyd and he was satisfied with the result. The foreground, effectively comprising half the entire picture, contains both lively and chaotic events. A truck carrying pigs crashes into a tree spilling the creatures and the driver into the street. A naked man climbs a tree to retrieve a tangled kite, lovers embrace on a park bench; one man continues his gardening,another individual exercises his muzzled greyhounds. A child is bathed in a horse trough and two one-legged cripples lurch nervously away from the action. In front of the central belching chimney a hearse drives by as part of a miner's funeral, to the graveyard with its coffin sliding out from it unnoticed, (so making a reference to an event in James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*). The essential meaning of Boyd's "world landscape" takes place in the modest mining town's church in the form of an expulsion. Taken from the New Testament book of Matthew the story of casting the money-lenders from the temple is a pertinent one in the development of Boyd's rejection of the materialistic values in the world bent on war and self-destruction. The artist's post-war scepticism was evident in *The Golden Calf* **(4.6)** and the Moses paintings where he addressed the destructive effects of greed and the worship of Mammon. *The Expulsion* **(4.11)** is a truly pivotal work in the development of such a theme to which he returned throughout his artistic career. The equation is made pointedly by Boyd between money (often represented by gold coins) and the unconscionable self-aggrandisement and chaos of war.

Another "world landscape" of great significance is Boyd's *Melbourne Burning* (1947-48) **(4.10)**, which takes on an apocalyptic nature that is unprecedented in the history of Australian painting. It is the last of Boyd's Brueghel paintings:

> The explosion in the centre recalls the atomic bomb at Hiroshima (1945) yet it is given immediacy by the presence of the Princes Bridge, the South Melbourne brick-works, Flinders Street Station and other Melbourne landmarks in the background. Apocalyptic visions are evoked by an angel blowing the trumpet, by the dead rising from their graves and the witness figure of St. John sitting in the foreground.[40]

The apocalyptic Old Testament book of Daniel later appealed to Boyd in his great series of graphic works and paintings on the subject of Nebuchadnezzar from the book of Daniel. This work was produced in an hour of crisis. "The use which it makes of apparently cryptic symbolism and mysterious numbers is an open invitation to that misplaced ingenuity which delights to find the events of our own day hidden in Scripture."[41]

Boyd's *Melbourne Burning* was produced in response to the moral crisis of the Second World War, and of particular significance in this context, the bombing of Hiroshima. While it was painted in a comparatively stable period following the war, the humanitarian message is poignant and searing. If apocalyptic means literally (Greek *apokaluptein*) to unveil the future, Boyd's image of the future of the world is indeed a grim one. Artistically it points the way to the development of the *Mars* paintings and drawings of the 1980s that were produced in collaboration with the potent poetry of Peter Porter and intended as a damning indictment of the arms race and politics in the late twentieth century.[42]

The next paintings of great significance are *The Expulsion* (1947-48) **(4.11)**, and *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve* (1947-48) **(4.13)**. In the catalogue of the Retrospective

Exhibition at the Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh in 1969 Tom Rosenthal referred to the inseparable blend of fantasy and reality in the world Boyd had created, but pointed out that his starting point for the reality was not very real in the first place:

> One sees this quite early on in the religious subjects of the late forties such as *The Expulsion* or *The Mockers*, works of astonishing maturity for a painter not yet thirty years old. They deal with material which is itself unreal, namely the received ideas of the Bible. . . the very idea of a guilt-ridden Adam and Eve being driven out of Eden, let alone by a yellow-clad, flying angel brandishing a whip is not reality but fantasy . . . Significantly, Boyd chooses subject matter which gives the greatest possible opportunity for his powers of invention, so that the fantasy becomes inherent in the matter of the painting; it is never arbitrarily applied but is, rather, a logical extension of the initial concept.[43]

This phantasmagorical tendency remained permanently in Boyd's work throughout each subsequent decade as a diffusing element but the humanitarian concerns persist. During the war years Boyd's drawings and paintings began to combine observed detail with autobiographical images. In *Lovers on a Bench* (1943), for example, Boyd referred to the lack of privacy during wartime "Park benches were often full, several couples on each!"[44] The hair and smoke were painted together to denote the fact that there was in Boyd's view no independence between the two, and the fact that it was impossible to escape from the surrounds. Boyd portrayed individuals and lovers as prisoners of their environment. When later in the war (1942) Boyd was transferred to the country town of Bendigo he used a rural backdrop for his drawings. His fiancée Yvonne Lennie was able to join him in Bendigo where she took a room above a shop there. An alarming experience for the young couple took place when the military police burst into them one night after he went AWOL from the army camp. This event became deeply etched in his memory and reinforced the

feelings he had developed whilst in the urban environment of wartime, where normal life was so dreadfully dislocated. Robert Hughes refers to it as "The vision of love as vulnerable, menaced by authority",[45] which finds form in *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve* (1947-48) **(4.13)**: "their bodies vulnerable as a pair of white tubers, embracing in an Eden that is also the Australian bush, while a huge patriarchal angel glares inquisitively at them from behind a tree, and a curly-horned ram — the libido in Boyd's iconography — stares back".[46]

Boyd himself points out that in the two paintings *The Expulsion* and *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve* the figures of Adam and Eve represent innocence and assume the role of the underdog.[47] In the *Angel Spying*, the angel is red, representing authority but he has no wings. (This may also be the red identifying features denoting Military Police.) He is either a messenger of God or maybe God himself. The ambiguity created emphasises the important element of fantasy or individual interpretation of the Bible. The central message is that of the immorality of people in power. It is directly related to the war and that the notion of God or the true message of Christianity was not adhered to by the Church of England or the Pope: "They never came out openly against Hitler".[48] Using hardboard with a chalk ground , Boyd applied washes of chrome green and red ochre; tempera and oil paint were then applied. The effect is a high luminosity enamel finish which is atmospheric and suggestive. Boyd recalled that there was no question about emulating the European landscape that typified religious painting historically but that he automatically set these Biblical events in the Australian bush.[49] He felt strongly that their being Australian was central to their being valid. *Jacob's Dream* (1947) **(4.12)**, has a similar

background to *Angel Spying*. A windmill is introduced into the landscape (there was one in Berwick) but Boyd tangles it with the bush. The same subject was painted with profound success by Paul Gauguin, in *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*,[50] an original and important work. Boyd's version has a divinely unstated quality, and is a very personal and touching image.Bernard Smith describes Boyd's painting of the 1940s in terms of its contrast with Drysdale's ordered composition, "The bush is a dark, primordial wood inhabited by those dwarfs and demons that once populated the medieval imagination,a St Anthony's wilderness full of strange devils. They sprout up from the earth, ride on monstrous animals, copulate, or crouch in loneliness, grief and despair. It is a vision of life heightened to a pitch of agonizing energy in which generations pass like generations of flies".[51] This was how Arthur Boyd expressed his anger. It is in contrast with the more realistic figurative mode adopted by Drysdale, notably in depicting aboriginalsand groups.

Contemporary critics such as Clive Turnbull, however found Boyd's biblical paintings "wholly distasteful". The use of eggtempera and oil paint gave the paintings of Boyd and Perceval a mannerist or baroque appearance, which alienated some contemporary critics. The Melbourne patron and critic, John Reed was less than impressed by Boyd's post-war work, believingit to be 'aesthetic backsliding', 'devoid of that very emotional quality they would seem to imply'.[52] Reed by contrast, championed the work of Nolan his close friend, which he described as "an inspired realization of the Australian bush", an "authentic national vision".[53] But here too, little social relevancecould in fact be deduced either, in Nolan's paintings, then or since.

In 1948, Martin Boyd, the uncle of Arthur Boyd, returned to Australia. An author, who by this time had achieved considerable recognition in London, he had been away from Australia for twenty-seven years. Martin Boyd decided rather impulsively before leaving England to buy back the Grange, the à Beckett family house at Harkaway, near Berwick. Then owned by a cousin, it had been built in the 1860s by Martin Boyd's grandfather.

> His wish for permanence and his strong sense of family — especially the à Beckett family — are evident; already, it seems, he had it in mind to create something like the à Beckett households he remembered before World War I. . . . In his eagerness Boyd seems not to have realised that he was trying to turn the clock back. The past was another country: he still had to discover post-war Australia and his own family.[54]

Martin Boyd had experienced literary success with his novel *Lucinda Brayford* (1946) which then precipitated the acquisition of some family portraits and a special sense of confidence that he could now live in patrician style as head of the family.

On Martin Boyd's return he found his brother Merric a frail 60 year old, forced by ill-health to give up his work as a potter. His main artistic endeavour was drawing:

> in his obsessive drawing of these last years, perception, recollections and religious preoccupation were merged and most of the pages of the drawing books — piled in mountains around his chair — were inscribed with the "perfect revelations" he had formerly directed at his children.[55]

To Martin, a conventional individual in manner and habit, Merric's household at Open Country, Murrumbeena represented an informal, bohemian style. By 1948 it had expanded to include Arthur and Yvonne Boyd and their two-year-old daughter Polly; and Mary and John Perceval and their first two children. Arthur was running the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery with John Perceval and Peter Herbst. Martin chose therefore to stay in Brighton while he made plans to move to the Grange. That the

Grange was uninhabitable and in need of a great deal of work did not deter Martin Boyd. Nor did the fact that it was very isolated, over an hour's drive from Melbourne, with no English "village" structure to support him socially or in practical ways that he had grown used to in England. He instinctively saw himself as a kind of English squire, referring to the Grange as "my cousin's seat" and he believed it was his responsibility to "sort out" Australian culture. Australians inevitably found him too anglophile, and socially alienating, and this sense was compounded by the lack of awareness of his work in Australia.[56] Brenda Niall's biography is a well-researched account of this author's life, his complex personality and restless nature.(see 4.31,4.32)

The Grange took eight months to complete. It was an expensive project and so Martin Boyd decided that a simple life tenancy was not sufficient; he now bought the freehold. But he was getting to know his nephews: Pat and Robin (Penleigh's sons) and Arthur, David and Guy (Merric's sons) and hoped that one of them could eventually inherit the house.[57] Martin was keen to play a role in their lives although his taste in architecture (pure Georgian at the Grange) clashed dramatically with Robin's modernist functionalism. Politically Robin leaned towards socialism; Martin towards a benevolent aristocracy. He was, however, able to assist in the career of Arthur, in whom he recognised artistic genius.[58] The offer was financially attractive:

> Arthur . . . was to paint frescoes on the dining room walls at the Grange. For this commission, which would take nearly three months of hard work, Martin offered the then generous sum of £500. Arthur and his family could come and live at the Grange, and without the need to support himself by working at the pottery he could paint full time.[59]

Martin and Arthur Boyd decided on the subjects for the frescoes together. They chose: the Prodigal Son (already painted by Arthur Boyd), Susannah and the Elders (Arthur's choice) and the Assumption (Martin's choice). "The Grange frescoes were all that either artist or patron could have wished for",[60] wrote Brenda Niall. Franz Philipp described them as "the crowning and completion of a sequence of Biblical paintings as well as a return to landscape painting".[61]

In Martin Boyd's *The Cardboard Crown* his fictional character Julian represents Arthur:

> Behind him was one of the walls he had painted, the harsh Australian landscape, the branches of the tree, blackened with fire, the distant hilltops glistening with dead trunks, and against this background, in the soft deep blues and reds of Renaissance clothing, Christ dining *al fresco* with the publicans.[62]

Arthur Boyd faced a challenge in technical terms for he had not painted a mural as such before. He chose the same medium as Tintoretto, obtaining the exact recipe from Max Doerner,[63] that of cassein tempera mixed with powder colour. He mixed the cassein underpaint with chrome green and applied it quickly. The next day red ochre was skilfully applied with the same broad brush strokes, creating a rich warm background.

> I then drew from a small cartoon with charcoal attached to a long bamboo stick. I was able to stand back to get the proportions right unlike being up on a scaffolding which is too close up. The excess charcoal was then dusted off and a scaffold built, as the ceilings were approximately twelve feet high. The total area painted was about sixty-seven feet by ten feet.[64]

The infinitely expressive late paintings by Rembrandt *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (1668 or 1669), which Boyd had studied in reproduction, must have informed his own depiction at the Grange. **(4.34)** It focuses on the son's return (unlike his two

earlier paintings on the same theme) and on the message of contrition and paternal love and forgiveness. *Susannah and the Elders* also draws inspiration from Rembrandt.**(10.22)** However, where in Rembrandt's version of the episode the elders actually touch her, Boyd takes his cue from Tintoretto **(4.33)** whose elders (in various versions) spy on her from behind the foliage. Boyd does not use a single model, however; the mood is Venetian (from Tintoretto) but the pose of Susannah which he used is derived directly from Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing in a Stream, (1655)* **(10.20)** in the National Gallery, London of which Boyd had some time before painted a copy from a reproduction. He does not disguise the appropriation — fully recognisable as based on Rembrandt's painting - but gives the image his signature by placing the figure against an Australian background, thus giving it a contemporary meaning. Franz Philipp observed that Boyd's Susannah became an emblem of beauty unveiled, spied on.[65] *The Assumption*, a very Roman Catholic image completes the frescoed room.

The awesome spiritual quality of Rembrandt's art (even in reproduction) undoubtedly moved Boyd, for while he did not share his uncle's religious faith, he had grown up in a highly religious family and one which held an almost sacred respect for art. Martin Boyd was clearly troubled by Arthur Boyd's left-wing politics and the apparent paradox that seemed to exist in Arthur's beliefs on art and religion.[66] They argued on the subject and Martin Boyd included such a conversation, almost unaltered in *The Cardboard Crown*:

> Your painting would damn you at once if the Communists had power. It's traditional, rooted in nature, Catholic, it breathes the inescapable sorrows of the human race. It denies flatly that science can cure the

> soul of man. Otherwise how could I have asked you to decorate a room in this house?[67]

The passage clearly expressed the now successful author's frustration upon returning to Australia and the disappointments he faced when he tried to reconcile the Old World and the New World. It also points to one of the inherent paradoxes in Arthur Boyd's artistic predilection for traditional methods and materials, for the works of the Old Masters and for the European tradition of history painting while at the same time wanting to make relevant statements about the plight of individuals in a contemporary setting, especially in the highly charged atmosphere of the wake of the Second World War. Boyd's appropriation of images from the Old Masters suggests that his primary inspiration is that of the "Biblical image in the art of the European Masters" rather than any inspiration based on a faith he might again hold in the existence of God. He aspired to the moral structure inherent in the Bible without actually believing in the factual basis of the allegories presented in it. Then he realised in the post-war period that he could in his own art harness the power of "Images of God" (to use Peter Fuller's term) in art as opposed to finding any inspiration through a personal faith as his own parents did, for example. Peter Fuller put forward the view in 1990 that for one who did not believe in the existence of God, art was the only source, in modern life, of spiritual comfort and redemption. Boyd's art of the post-war years is based on just such a realisation.

In explanation, Peter Fuller stated in the New Foreword to the second edition of *Images of God* (1990):

> For myself, I remain an incorrigible atheist; that is my proclamation of faith. Yet there is something about the experience of art, itself, which compels me to re-introduce the category of the "spiritual". More than

> that, I believe that, given the ever-present absence of God, art, and the gamut of aesthetic experience, provides the sole remaining glimmer of transcendence. The best we can hope for is that aesthetic surrogate for salvation: redemption through form.[68]

The evident paradox in Boyd's Biblical paintings (between traditional and contemporary imagery) and the resultant juxtaposition of such unlikely components on a single picture plane establish at once both an energy and a tension directly expressing the complexity and contradiction inherent in twentieth-century experience and resultant culture. Boyd undoubtedly added here a unique contribution to the history of Australian painting of this period.

Ceramic Paintings and Sculptures

Arthur Boyd's interest in ceramics was a natural progression from a childhood dominated by the successes and failures of his father's pottery. Recognised as Australia's first real artist-potter, Merric Boyd was both gifted and innovative in his work. His zeal for all artistic endeavour was transferred to his children. However the financial hardship that accompanied the potter's life also dismayed them. This reaction was exacerbated by the disastrous fire that afflicted the pottery in 1926. The family was reduced to acute poverty as a result.[69]

Towards the end of the war however, Arthur Boyd with John Perceval and Peter Herbst established the Arthur Merric Boyd Pottery. The intention was that the artists could be underpinned by this venture which would in turn enable them to continue working as painters. A further advantage of the pottery enterprise was that it facilitated the discharge of both from the Australian army. Their plan was to produce "utilitarian wares for Australia's war-depleted market".[70] Perceval and Herbst themselves acquired basic pottery skills from Merric Boyd. The two painters took

over an established pottery with a gas kiln from Hatton Beck, also based in Murrumbeena. With several assistants they produced earthenware pottery which was sold at the premises and also in the city of Melbourne, at the Primrose Pottery Shop and at Georges. The AMB pottery according to Boyd, enabled those involved to make a living;at night he and Perceval painted at their studios at Open Country. Boyd described his own pottery-throwing as being "in his father's tradition".[71] He was not particularly interested in experimenting with forms then; it was the decoration and the use of different glazes that drew him. In later years, through the same medium, Boyd went on to produce originaland exquisite works. The actual process of ceramics excited him as well. He recalled the thrill of the firing:

> The fireboxes would be kindled. Eventually the entire stack would become a glowing pillar of light in the night sky . . . More than anything else of my childhood, I recall the excitement of kiln opening mornings. . . that was always a marvellous event.[72]

Boyd was only involved with the AMB Pottery on a full-time basis from 1944 until late 1948 although the partnership was not formally dissolved until 1958.[73] As well as making an important contribution to pottery in Australia the small workshop served as an important meeting place for artists and intellectuals.[74] The early work produced at the pottery was generally simple in design; glazed earthenware decorated with images of flora and fauna. Geoffrey Edwards, who organised an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, *The Painter as Potter Decorated Ceramics of the Murrumbeena Circle* (1982), considers the AMB pottery to represent "one of the most extraordinary chapters in the development of Australian ceramics; earthenware vessels distinguished from the mainstream of ceramic

production through expressive painting, a rich palette and exuberance of spirit and through the incorporation of motifs used in the artists' paintings".[75]

Inspired by Rembrandt's *A Woman Bathing in a Stream* (1655) **(10.20)**, Boyd's *Bowl* (1944-45) **(also 4.15)**, is a powerful and rich image. The strength and purity of colour is a celebration of the painterly technique "discovered" by Boyd. In fact the discovery as such was far from unique historically speaking. Boyd and Perceval were influenced by ceramic works in the National Gallery of Victoria. For example *Europa and Bull Platter* (1948), is an early case where the mythological images created are developed as a ceramic painting. Boyd's "decorations" of practical vessels were never merely decorative, and he later transferred the Europa theme onto tiles.

> I remembered a lot of the decorations that my mother and father used on pottery were slip decorations and some of the quality of their painting was very similar to certain qualities in oil paintings . . . it seemed a natural and familiarmedium for me to try."[76]

Between 1949 and 1953, an important period for the development of his painting and imagery, Boyd gave significant priority to ceramic painting. Deborah Edwards observed:

> Whilst the decoration of ceramic tiles was undertaken by John Perceval, David Boyd and Hatton Beck, it was Boyd's ability to avoid a graphic or decorative emphasis for a painterly one, facilitated by his idiosyncratic use of oxides and slip (mixed to the consistency of oil paint) which makes his works unique. In this he was influenced by the slip decorations of Merric and Doris Boyd. One outstanding quality of the paintings is their sheer brilliance of colour, the frequently commented-on "stained glass effect" which Boyd achieved through extensive experimentation with firing methods and lead glazes . . . certainly Boyd created objects as luminous, intense, and as brooding as Rouault's Gothic visions of sin and redemption.[77]

Boyd produced in all some one hundred tiles between 1949 and 1953. They were subsequently exhibited in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, and sold

relatively cheaply (£5-£10 each) on account of "a general resistance to ceramics", that they were breakable and that "the subjects weren't very Australian — they weren't landscapes".[78] The subjects for the ceramics ran parallel to his paintings. They too were concerned with life and death, love, guilt and alienation and include a very original and personal response to such timeless themes. *Icarus Fallen in a Field* (1951-52) **(4.16)**, is an awkward cubist figure denoting the fall from grace following the vanity of this mythological creature who flew too close to the sun. *Jonah Swallowed by the Whale* (1950) **(4.17)**, is an early example of Boyd's interest in the Old Testament story that inspired the poet Peter Porter and himself to create a collaborative work and publication in 1973. Franz Phillip describes the significance of the early ceramic painting:

> In the ceramic paintings of 1950-3 Arthur Boyd found a field of threefold experimentation: colouristic, compositional and iconographic: the relatively small surface lends itself more easily to such pictorial exploration, but it can also be treated as a unit of a larger or indeed quite large compositional edifice such as the *Romeo and Juliet* polyptych of 1964. Already during his first experimentation with the medium, Boyd often talked expectantly of such large tile ensembles, to be applied as inside or outside 'murals', the glazed and fired tile being quite weather-proof — a dream not to be realised before his Shakespeare Exhibition commission.[79] **(5.17,5.18)**

Temptation of St. Anthony (1951) **(4.18)**, was composed of nine tiles forming the largest ceramic picture of period. The subject was favoured by Bosch and by the sixteenth century mannerists and was usually given a strongly erotic flavour. Boyd's iconography is — as so often — very unconventional and personal:

> the youthful saint throwing up his arms in the age-old gesture of lament and horror is enclosed by the full circle of Boydian signs of ominous presence; the black bird, red-eyed with evil beak, the dark rearing bull with looped rams' horns ('ramox'), the serpent. The main female temptress is suspended from a bare branch in a swing of full

> exposure, her background companion, a very literal fountain nymph, spews the water jet into the pool.[80]

Franz Philipp describes Boyd's ceramic sculpture of 1953 as resuming and completing the artistic train of thought of the preceding years. Describing the exhibition of sixteen pieces in Melbourne in 1955, in the *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria* (1955), he stated: "One felt like walking in a strange forest of gnomic beings, a world magically convincing, yet imaginatively separate from ours".[81]

The compassion and calm expressed in *Saul and David* (1952-53), is remarkable considering the unlikely and distorted style. The noses are beak-like, the hands like large claws; they are barely human and yet they are quintessentially so. The formal device of the triangular harp-shape wedged between the figures whose heads lean inwards create a cohesion with great expressive power.

Where *Saul and David* is frontally conceived, *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1952-53) **(4.20)**, is free-standing, "with the antagonistic elements facing in opposite directions, turning outward on an oval perimeter".[82] This work brilliantly combines sculptural, ceramic and painterly qualities.**(see also 4.19)** The beard, for example, is hatched into the clay and then paint (glaze) is applied giving a layered and sophisticated patina:

> This clay is brick clay. I bought it from the brickworks direct in big slabs and flattened it out to about an inch to an inch and a half with a mallet and then just bent it. I hadn't seen anybody else do it. I painted the terracotta with a tin oxide and a bit of clay mixed with tin oxide. Once that was painted white all over, I coloured it with oxides-chrome, copper and cobalt.[83]

Only four of the sixteen sculptured exhibited by Arthur Boyd in 1955 were religious works. The others included *Dancers*, *Girls Playing Basketball* (1953-54),

and some humorous works such as *Schoolboy Riding a Goat* and *Ned Kelly.* One, *Big Fish and Little Fish* uses as its title almost the same as Brueghel's haunting work, of 1556 referred to earlier in this chapter.**(10.6)** In the same period, the surge of productive and successful activity in ceramic sculpture in 1953 and 1954 had led Boyd to accept a public commission. This was large in scale and technically perhaps the most exacting sculptural work which Boyd was to attempt, creating numerous problems as well as incurring a financial setback for the artist. Resembling a giant totem pole, the large ceramic monument was constructed for the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne. It was not a great success, however:

> Due to its scale and the required vertical axis, Boyd had to abandon the slab construction of his sculptures for a method involving painted ceramic bricks affixed to a central interior column or armature, which ultimately highlighted the limitations of the medium for monumental forms — a point illustrated by a comparison with the bolder, more adventurous maquette for the work.[84]

Boyd was to work on the totem pole almost exclusively for nearly eighteen months for neither he, nor the architects (for the new Olympic Swimming Pool) who had commissioned him had fully realised what was involved.[85] The beauty and success of Boyd's own small sculptures relied on the fact that their form was in fact dictated by the artist's knowledge and skills; he constructed these works in a manner related to the making of the tiles, in pursuit of an idea deeply conceived and pursued through to completion. For Arthur Boyd, this was an essentially intuitive response to the medium, in the formation and creation of new work wholly consistent within his *oeuvre* as an entirety. It was time for Boyd to return to that essential process.

By the early 1950s Arthur Boyd had begun to enjoy success as a landscape painter. At the Grange he painted a number of landscapes of the Berwick area which

display a balanced, ordered and harmonious environment. Having completed the allegorical dramas of the Biblical paintings Boyd enjoyed for a while the solace of the pure landscape that had so inspired him before the war on the Mornington Peninsula and in the Murrumbeena area. After the Grange murals were complete Arthur Boyd and his young family stayed on in the flat there. Martin Boyd increasingly enjoyed his nephew's growing success to the point of providing financial backing for an exhibition at the Kozminsky Gallery in 1949.

> I went into your show today and found almost no pictures had sold, . . . I suppose the half-witted second-rate public here don't understand a painter who sees anything more in the Australian landscape than a pretty surface . . . There is no question of its unique merit, and at least the critics have recognized that. You are bound in due course to receive the full recognition your work deserves. This is a financial disappointment (troublesome enough God knows) but nothing more.[86]

For his part Arthur Boyd keenly encouraged Martin Boyd in return to use his great love of family history as the basis of a novel based on the lives of his grandparents.

The landscape around Berwick was undulating and beautiful. It had a quality about it that Australians refer to as English or European; that is, it gives the impression of having been cultivated and trodden by human experience and is in contrast to the thick inhospitable bush of Boyd's Hunter paintings. Unlike a threatening or melancholic quality which can be perceived in the Australian landscape, the Berwick landscape (some 30 miles east of Melbourne), represents an aspect of the Victorian landscape that could be described as an "interval of calm".[87] Indeed Boyd evokes a dream of pastoral peace, of mankind and nature in harmony. Unlike the romantic grandeur of Streeton however, these landscapes of Boyd are a simple celebration of a hard and elementary way of life.

In *Boat Builders* (Eden, 1948) **(4.21)**, he also evokes a landscape and vision of creation that is imaginative and poetic rather than learned. The magical effects of life and the splendid detail are created by a genuine emphasis on the craft of painting and a lively interest in the techniques of the Old Masters. Boyd had travelled to Eden, on the south coast of New South Wales, in the late 1930s with his friend and fellow painter Wilfred McCulloch. They camped at Eden and painted the idyllic scene: Boyd remembers the small jetty and the view across Twofold Bay. A distant relative in the 1840s, Benjamin Boyd, had established a whaling station there, on account of its having a very deep harbour. He named it Boydtown and tried hard for it to be established as the nation's capital.

In 1948, Arthur Boyd returned to the idea of painting the coastal landscape at Eden when he was experimenting with tempera.[88] The jewel-like enamelled surface, created by combining egg tempera and glazing (used also in *The Mining Town*) is particularly successful in this work for it enabled tiny detail to be combined with an arabesque, panoramic effect. Of particular significance in terms of composition and subject matter in *The Boat Builders* (1948), is the apparent debt it owes in art historical terms to Brueghel's painting *The Gloomy Day*,[89] **(10.7)** which forms part of the series of paintings by Brueghel, *The Months*. Indeed, Boyd uses the same high horizon as Brueghel (also in *The Mining Town* and *Melbourne Burning*). He echoes Brueghel's line, denoting mountains and sea precisely, to denote a group of hills on the left and the water's edge at Eden. The Brueghel relevance relates to a particular usage in the Boyd work of the similarly raised ground on which the boat is being constructed by two figures. In the Brueghel painting the activity to the right hand side involves

two figures, one cutting down branches, the other binding them for use, stooped in a semi-horizontal pose; Boyd shows two figures, one manoeuvring materials in construction, the other stooped in a semi-horizontal position. In the right middle ground of the Brueghel, is the gable end of a cottage undergoing maintenance: in the right middle ground of the Boyd painting, we find the boat under construction in an almost identical position. On the left centre of both works are elongated thin trees. Here the similarity, other than the almost identical, sinuous outline of the bay below sharply ends: nor is there any comparison in mood: where Brueghel charts a gloomy, overbearing February sky with ominous clouds, Boyd depicts a rich cobalt sea, the horizon shimmering in the bright Australian sunlight. The painting is a technical triumph, and one of Boyd's loveliest works.

In 1950 Boyd travelled through the Wimmera district of Victoria. The dry and sparsely populated areas of land of yellow grass, burnt stubble, crows and sheep still convey the sense of solitude created by a number of his peninsula paintings of the 1930s. In *Wimmera Landscape* (1950), and *Burnt Wheat Stubble* (1950-1) **(4.24)** Boyd created an archetypal Australian landscape. Possessing both a poetic lyricism and a down-to-earth quality and capturing the glorious light of Australia, these works do not present drama or conflict but a sense of acceptance that many Australians in the country could identify with readily. The paintings of this period now established Arthur Boyd as one of the most important landscape painters of his generation. This body of work clearly illustrated the fundamental pattern that was now developing and which he continued to pursue for the remainder of his artistic life, that of a clear alternation between pure landscape on the one hand and on the other, the heightened

allegorical dramas that compulsively occur, for Boyd, in the Australian landscape. The Wimmeralandscapes were in fact painted before Boyd had travelled into the real desert as such. Although arid and bleached they do not possess the drama that in time informed the subsequent paintings, inspired largely by his trip to Central Australia in 1951.

Yet (unforeseen by Boyd) the landscape itself in Central Australia was not to be the real key to the dramatic paintings of 1958. Proficiently, he carried sketchbooks and noted numerous details of the animals, birds, trees and plants. These works are in the same vein as the Wimmera paintings. But it was, however, to be the Aborigines, in the end, and the appalling conditions under which they existed that now obsessively were to drive Boyd's imagination positively forward. There came now an incubation period of all of six years before the artist responded deeply and profoundly to their plight.

Martin Boyd left Australia for Europe in June 1951 in order to experience "the literary freedom of the outcast".[90] It was clear that the Grange could never replace Murrumbeena as the centre of creative family life; and the contrasts between his English traditional life and the new Australia in the 1940s proved irreconcilable.[91] The following year he sent back instructions for the sale of the Grange. In 1956 the Grange (with its murals) was sold for a second time, to the Narre Warren Blue Metal Company. A massive quarry now swallowed half of the garden and wholly overwhelmed the house. Considerable efforts were made by Robin Boyd, John Perceval and John Reed to save Boyd's murals. They did not however, succeed. On

12 March 1966 Arthur Boyd wrote urgently to Joseph Brown, art dealer and friend, to intervene to save the murals which he described as among his best work.

> I hope you may be able to do something to save it. Robin Boyd and John Reed tried to do something about two years ago, I believe, but nothing came of it. Franz Philipp of the Melbourne University Fine Arts Department who is writing a book on my painting, wrote to me saying he is trying to get the Melbourne National gallery interested in saving the mural. He went to Harkaway with Mr David Lawrence the restorer at the Melbourne National Gallery. My idea is if you could buy it from you, you would at least get your money back. If they did not offer you the full amount, it cost you to remove, I would make up the balance to you with the sort of paintings you like, perhaps tempera landscapes or whatever paintings you prefer. If the National Gallery did not pay anything at all for the removal but would take it from you as a gift, I would make up the total cost to you in paintings....The main thing is, if the mural is going to be saved, it will have to be done quickly.[92]

During the war, Joseph Brown had been stationed near Berwick in the 13th Light Horse Regiment and therefore knew the area. He immediately contacted a number of locals and visited the Grange. He reported, "I was absolutely staggered by the outside appearance, it has completely gone to ruin and is certainly beyond restoration. The mural itself is magnificent, and what there is left of it is certainly worth saving."[93] Brown approached a firm of Italian Stonemasons whom he had watched restoring St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne with meticulous care. John Giannarelli initially refused the job but was eventually persuaded to undertake the delicate operation. Joseph Brown acted tirelessly from March 1966 to December 1967, during which the owners changed again causing complicated delays. Brown wrote to Boyd on 22 December 1967:

> It is quite amazing considering the fact that the work was over a considerable period exposed to the hands of vandals and thieves and ravages of time, most of what we have saved is in excellent condition and there are only a few scratches here and there which I am sure you will be

> able to eradicate when you set about restoring the lot. Moreover, at the last moment we got an extra section out and therefore have four pieces. They vary in size but the average dimensions would be about 5' x 8'.[94]

In April 1969, the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board purchased the salvaged portions of the Grange for a nominal $6,000.

Revisiting the Bride 1951, 1955-58

The most important event for Arthur Boyd in the 1950s, and one which was to have a dramatic effect on his subsequent work, was his journey to the Simpson Desert in Central Australia, undertaken in the winter of 1951. To form an appraisal of the series that resulted from that trip: *Love, Marriage and Death of a Half-Caste,* (1955-1957) **(4.35-4.44)** fifty years on, is in fact a complex task. Australian social attitudes to Aborigines and the level of dialogue on the subject of their appalling plight has become a central preoccupation affecting Australian society and the nation's political agenda, escalated in the 1980s and 1990s. It is not feasible therefore fifty years on to judge Arthur Boyd's social comment which was the driving force behind his imagery without defining the fundamental changes in attitude and terminology that have taken place since. Only then can the many commentators on the *Bride* series (the abbreviated title) be seen in terms of what is today deemed a politically incorrect, outdated model.[95]

In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission presented "Bringing Them Home", the **National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.** The report was a chilling and public revelation to the media of the systematic attempt at social and biological engineering by the forcible removal of Indigenous children in Australia since early colonisation.

> Violent battles over rights to land, food and water sources characterised race relations in the nineteenth century. Throughout this conflict Indigenous children were kidnapped and exploited for their labour ...Governments and missionaries also targeted Indigenous children for removal from their families. Their motives were "to inculcate European values and work habits in children, who would then be employed in service to the colonial settlers".
>
> By the middle of the nineteenth century the "protectorate experiment had failed and the very survival of Indigenous people was being questioned. Forced off their land to the edges of non-Indigenous settlement, dependent upon government rations if they could not find work, suffering from malnutrition and disease, their presence was unsettling and embarrassing to non-Indigenous people. Governments typically viewed Indigenous people as a nuisance. The violence and disease associated with colonisation was characterised, in the language of Social Darwinism, as a natural process of the "survival of the fittest". According to this analysis, the future of the Aboriginal people was inevitably doomed; what was needed from governments and missionaries was to "smooth the dying pillow".[96]

Government policy sought to separate Aborigines by reserving land and to establish a Protection Board that would be given power to control movement, marriage and employment. Children were separated from their families. Police enforced the "law". Intermarriage was the key to absorption; what was not taken into account was that they would not lose their Aboriginal identity. In 1937 the *Brisbane Telegraph* summed up the Government attitude thus:

> Mr Neville (the Chief Protector of Western Australia) holds the view that within one hundred years the pure black will be extinct. But the half-caste problem was increasing every year. Therefore their idea was to keep the pure blacks segregated and absorb the half-castes into the white population. Sixty years ago, he said, there were over 60,000 full-blooded natives in Western Australia. Today there are only 20,000. In time there would be none. Perhaps it would take one hundred years, perhaps longer, but the race was dying. The pure blooded Aboriginal was not a quick breeder. On the other hand the half-caste was. In Western Australia there were half-caste families of twenty and upwards. That showed the magnitude of the problem.[97]

A particularly cynical development in government policy was that "people with more than a stipulated proportion of European 'blood'[98] were disqualified from living on reserves with their families or receiving rations. This tactic of 'dispersing' Aboriginal camps was used extensively. An analysis of the definition of 'Aboriginality' has found more than 67 definitions in over seven hundred pieces of legislation".[99]

In 1951 in Central Australia a broadly unsuspecting Arthur Boyd came face to face with the plight of these people, forced off their reserves, unable to find employment, not entitled to social security benefits that non-Indigenous people were granted to as right. They lived in squalid, shanty towns on the edge of reserves or white townships. Given that Boyd had travelled to Central Australia as an artist to paint the landscape, he was doubly shocked to see the appalling conditions of the inhabitants.

> Seeing the centre that way, by train and car, was much more intimate than seeing it from a plane. You got a sense of it being extremely vast and much more extraordinary than I'd ever believed. It wasn't a question of going a couple of hundred miles. You could go thousands of miles, on and on forever. It was extremely hot and seeing the Aborigines in such a bad state was depressing. I had prior to my trip, only seen one Aboriginal, a chap around Melbourne who played a gumleaf; that was in my late teens.[100]

Boyd had seen Aborigines portrayed in painting. The earliest depictions date from the first years of settlement. Bernard Smith observed:

> Artists of the time [of Cook's landing] made a practice of using poses and gestures selected from well-known pieces of classical sculpture in order to represent heroism and nobility in the figures they drew...Furthermore many educated people of the time firmly believed that all primitive people were naturally noble and heroic because their lives were lived close to nature free from the complexities and

> temptations of civilisation. They considered them, in other words, to be noble savages.[101]

Professional artists were provided for scientific expeditions to Australia to record the landscape and topology, native peoples, flora and fauna. Actual colonial experience however, clashed with the romantic image of the noble savage as depicted in the early decades of white settlement.

> For the great majority of the colonists the natives represented the lowest condition of human existence. Contact with Europeans debauched their intricate tribal structure and shattered the economic basis of their existence. Clad in old rags to hide their nakedness from the eyes of the newcomers, the Aborigines became, during the 1820s and 1830s, the butt of a cruel and insensitive colonial humour.[102]

The nineteenth century portrayals of Aborigines run parallel to the information pertaining to government policy. To the evangelists and evolutionists: "Aborigines were pagan savages who [saving Christian conversion] were destined to perdition; to the evolutionist they were creatures but one step above the brute creation, destined to extinction by the immutable laws of natural selection."[103] Images of Aborigines in Australian art thus became marginal. Few artists in the early twentieth century were interested in depicting Aborigines. In the 1940s Yosl Bergner portrayed them from a position of Jewish empathy as a "dispossessed minority",**(10.27)** and Noel Counihan made numerous paintings, drawings and prints of the Aboriginal plight. Counihan recalled, "Bergner identified with the Aborigines. He saw them from a Jewish standpoint and painted them as Jews. He stepped across the gap and identified with members of another oppressed race".[104] In *Aboriginal Mother and Child*, 1960, **(10.25)** Counihan welds the two figures together; the contours of the form intensify the feeling

of being held and emphasise the close relationship between the mother and child. He was attempting to offer a means for people to get closer to the Aborigines, to see them, not as odd animals, but as people. The imageof the mother becomes the symbol of compassion. Counihan was concerned with respect and love between humans regardless of colour, class or sex. Russell Drysdale in the early 1950s portrayed the Aborigines in the landscape. As late as 1986 Ursula Hoff describes this portrayal of them as "the holder of the mysteries of the Stone Age".[105] Understandably, by present day standards, Hoff herself did not experience the "consciousness-raising" that has taken place in Australia in the past thirty years. Margaret Plant duly acknowledges currently preferred terminology when she refers to Boyd's *Love, Marriage and Death of the Half-Caste* as *The Bride* series.[106] Nicholas Usherwood in 2001 writing for Agnew's Exhibition, *You Beaut Country: A Selectionof Australian Painting 1940-2000*, is mindful of the shift in attitudes towards Aboriginal culture in his discussion of Russell Drysdale's Queensland paintings of 1952-52, just prior to Boyd's journey to Central Australia.

> Drysdale seems to be suggesting, in a quietly oblique form, not just the astonishing antiquity of the landscape itself but a powerful sense of the Aboriginal's human and spiritual presence within it also, emphasised by the curious, sketchily outlined figure to be discerned between the two foreground rocks. These works came to form the precursors of his celebrated full-scale Aboriginal subjects... which when first shown.. provided the first serious treatment in painting of Aboriginal figure subjects by a twentieth century European artist, in their compassion, dignity and sensitivity, began to shift a whole generation of attitudes towards a better understanding of their significance within the country's history and culture.[107]

Drysdale's drawings are more factual (like Boyd's sketchbooks of 1951), less despairing images than his paintings. **(10.28)** He produced a series of drawings for a

book published in 1961 *Journey Among Men*, written by Professor Jack Marshall following their extensive scientific journey around Australia.[108] Drysdale's knowledge of rural Australia, especially the Centre, was more closely familiar, intimate than Boyd's. Boyd had travelled into the bush and was a landscape painter of exceptional talent and achievement. In terms of his direct experience of Aborigines, his contact was severely limited to the single trip in 1951. In the early 1980s, in an interview with Grazia Gunn, Boyd recalled:

> At that stage the plight of the Aborigines still wasn't known to most Australians, although Drysdale had done some very good paintings depicting their condition. He gave them great dignity, although that's not how they seemed to me, living in "wurlies" (huts) made of bits of corrugated iron and old fencing wire. I was quite unprepared for the Simpson Desert and seeing people living like that....
> My contact with the Aborigines was not close at all, but it was close enough to know that it wasn't right. I hadn't known anything about it. I was amazed that in 1951 no one seemed concerned. Drysdale's *Aborigines Standing* under a tent were poor, but dignified, and they did not seem to be suffering. I did drawings as a kind of traveller and things did not hit home until three years later, when I began to paint from some of the drawings I'd done."[109]

By the early eighties increased knowledge of concealed government policy towards Aborigines, their continued abysmal plight led to long-term protests outside Parliament House in Canberra (during the 1970s) and pressure to confront the distressing inequality suffered by Australian Aborigines. At this stage too, Boyd felt a sense of inadequacy over his *Bride* paintings, believing that he should have "been done in a much stronger way". He regretted using "soft, pretty colours" and felt that they should have been more Goyaesque.[110] In 1990 in an interview with Peter Fuller, he went so far as to say that Aborigines would object to his *Bride* series because he

had made paintings like a comic strip; "but it didn't occur to me that it was like that. I thought I was doing it the only way I could, because I didn't want to lose the idea."

Noel Counihan in 1961 wrote an article on Australian painting for the Russian journal *Foreign Literature* in which he was highly critical of both Drysdale's and Boyd's representation of Aborigines. In 1958 he had written to Paul Hasluck, then Minister for Territories in the Menzies government, over the tragic situation of Albert Namatjira's jailing for providing liquor to members of his extended family.[111] As early as 1959 he had been "the first major voice among artists to protest about Australia's treatment of (Albert) Namatjira" (*Tribune*, 1.4.59)[112]. Counihan's letter to Hasluck stated,

> As fellow artists and fellow citizens of Albert Namatjira we wish to express our deep concern at the tragic situation in which he finds himself - a situation not altogether of his own making. We feel that in carrying out the letter of the law a great injury has been done to his tribal traditions and relationships. Namatjira's humiliation is our humiliation and will already appear so in the eyes of the world. We respectfully but earnestly request that on the grounds of humanity he be released.[113]

The letter was signed by thirteen artists including Counihan and Boyd. In spite of Boyd supporting his letter to Hasluck, when Counihan came to write about the portrayal of Aborigines in contemporary art in 1961, he was critical of the *Bride* paintings. Counihan wrote: "The work by Arthur Boyd was rent by contradiction. His vividly realistic landscapes of the hot dry Mallee region of the north-west Victoria are deservedly popular, but the crudely primitive forms and imagery of his allegorical series on aboriginal themes have little relation to reality".[114] Drysdale's "powers of interpretation" Counihan believed were "not up to his 'talent for moody and dramatic design". In his "portrayal of the physiognomy of the dark people certain unintended

but nevertheless persistent racialist clichés make their appearance".[115] Counihan was ahead of his time in terms of his analysis of the in-built racial prejudice, though it was not conscious, on the part of both Boyd and Drysdale. In this, Boyd's work is the product of the 1950s in that he uses the terms of "Abo" and "Half-Caste", terms offensive to Indigenous people and no longer considered appropriate, and in the sense that while he was deeply shocked by seeing the conditions in which Aborigines existed, he did not spend time in their situation (unlike Drysdale in NSW **(10.29)** and Queensland and Counihan at Swan Hill in Victoria **(10.26)**) or pursue the cause for Aboriginal Rights again until the 1980s.[116] It is interesting to note that Sidney Nolan who in his own narrative, also sought to mythologise the Australian experience and who worked prolifically on the re-activated stories of Ned Kelly and Burke and Wills, **(10.32,10.33,10.34)** hardly included Aborigines in his work. In Tom Rosenthal's recent study of Nolan, the first comprehensive study of his work, he notes that in the *Burke and Wills* series, one "cannot but notice the almost complete absence of the Aborigines who played such a large part in the journey....with the exception of a solitary bystander in Burke and Wills leaving Melbourne in 1950 and a black man pointing out directions to a naked Burke on a camel in Burke and Wills Expedition, 1962 there are virtually no black faces".[117] Responding to the high incidence of Aboriginal suicides in custody Nolan produced a series of works in the 1980s to express his outrage. Rosenthal states, however, that a response to a contemporary event was very much the exception for Nolan who was apolitical. There is one painting of 1947 *Aboriginal Hunt*, based on the extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines, which in Rosenthal's words, "leaving the hunted man's physiognomy out

of it, looks like nothing so much as a scene from a classic John Ford Western movie when the posse, relentlessly closing in on a dangerous and drunken Apache, is seen in long shot on the top of a bluff against a dramatic skyline. It is a striking picture, but the Aborigine seems so stylised as to appear more symbolic and archetypal than a living individual human being in trouble".[118] David Boyd, Arthur's brother, also painted on the subject of the Tasmanian Aborigines (1959); they are somewhat tortured, stylised images by present standards **(10.30,10.31)**, although Bernard Smith stated: "These early explorer and Tasmanian paintings are romantically conceived; the figures crowd upon the canvas grotesquely, and often possess a touch of the comic'.[119] David Boyd's work was criticised for being a mere imitation of his brother's, but his is more direct and he seeks his "symbolism in historical events."[120]

Arthur Boyd's *Bride* series has been regarded by all commentators on his work, to be of great importance in his *oeuvre.* When they were first exhibited in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, they received a mixed response, and only a third of the paintings sold. In Sydney the criticism was most severe, described as "bad painting"; the artist had mistaken an idea for a painting.[121] Bernard Smith observed that "Ideas in art had become the unforgiveable sin".[122] He subsequently took them to London where they were shown at Zwemmers Gallery and were received as a *tour de force.*

From a formal perspective, Boyd's *Bride* paintings departed radically from previous works. There is still what Margaret Plant has described as "retrieval and self-quotation" but the most obvious art-historical reference is to the work of Marc Chagall whom Boyd would first have encountered in the form of reproductions at Gino Nibbi's Leonardo Book Shop in Melbourne. The work of Chagall, Rouault, Van Gogh, Gauguin

and Christopher Wood all interested Boyd. A single Chagall was included in the Melbourne *Herald* exhibition of 1939.[123] Commenting on the *Bride* works Smith writes "The paintings.. do not refer to an actual event and recall few remembered observations: they are conceived as in a dream, a dream that owes something to Chagall, Rembrandt, surrealism and Boyd's circle of painter friends."[124] Philipp and Hoff both link the *Bride* series to the influence of Chagall;[125] Plant writes: " The force of Marc Chagall's mid-century influence is clear in the double bride profile and the unconvincing levitation of the pastor and witnesses protruding through the roof of the church. One detail further hints at the rupture of the literal that marks the series - the aboriginal dog that jumps up at the bridal couple has a patterning that quotes aboriginal art."[126] The surreal juxtaposition of dream and mundane life in Chagall's paintings such as *I and the Village* (1911-12) **(10.10)** with rich colours and an atmosphere of Russian peasant art would have appealed to Boyd very greatly. *Over the Town* (1924) **(10.11)**, provides the image of floating figures, specifically couples that Boyd uses most effectively in *Half-Caste Wedding* (1955) **(4.33)**, the first of the Bride series which he painted in his Beaumaris studio. Likewise Chagall's symbolism: the tree of life, the crucifix, animals and humans in close proximity and in harmony were elements that Boyd absorbed. The imagery in *Bouquet with Flying Lovers*, 1934-47 **(10.12)** is used by Boyd as a starting point for the *Bride* paintings, *Shearers Playing for a Bride*, 1957 **(4.37)**, and also the *Lovers* **(5.5)** paintings that he painted in London in the 1960s. The bouquet, floating lovers, birds are all absorbed into Boyd's inventory. In Chagall's paintings of the 1940s he uses incredible imagery: in *The Martyr*, **(10.13)** there is at once a Crucifixion, a bride, a man playing violin, a flying red beast, burning buildings and a man, in the place of a

prophet or narrator reading a book. A number of paintings on the subject of the wedding are important in the development of Chagall's *oeuvre* (*The Madonna of the Village*, 1938-44 **(10.15)**); in these Boyd found a perfect source, for he had in Central Australia witnessed a wedding.[127] Boyd was able to combine the art-historical imagery from his Jewish mentor with the disturbing memories of the dispossessed Aborigines, victims of white society and no longer fully integrated in their own Aboriginal culture. Boyd's *Bride* series conveys the agony and pathos of the Aboriginal experience. The titles include the emotions, played out by Boyd's Chagallian figures, informed too by his ceramic sculptures of the 1940s. These marionette-like figures with huge eyes are mourning, running away, persecuted, frightened, doomed. *The Hunter (Aboriginal Head on a Horse with Soldier)* 1959 **(9.6)** is a particularly haunting and dreadful image. The exact meaning of this and all of the *Bride* series is elusive and yet one is left with a sense of betrayal and loss.

Boyd travelled to Central Australia ostensibly to paint the landscape. The vast landscape which he was in awe of, was four years after his trip no longer as important as the Aborigines whose plight had troubled him. So, when he finally painted the *Love, Marriage and Death of a Half-Caste* (1955-58) he magnified the figures, amplified their pain, effectively pushing the landscape out of the picture plane. He produced 20 large paintings in four years. There is a tragic denial of hope in these works; and now, almost fifty years later, the **National Inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission** reveals that reality was in fact more appalling than society at large could comprehend. In the 1980s Boyd himself admitted as much. Counihan's response was through continued political action; in his portrayal of the Aborigines he chose the

timeless, religiously-charged image of mother and child in order to emphasise their own humanity. It was a poignant choice because it is now considered that the forced separation of children from their mothers is the single most damning act by white Australians to apply a systematically ethnic policy of social and biological manipulation.[128]

Whatever their social or political deficit, Boyd's *Bride* paintings are, in formal terms, fabulous creations. Bernard Smith stated that the *Bride* paintings are "a brilliant vindication of the role of the artist as a critic of society". In 1958, Ursula Hoff wrote for *Meanjin*,

> He leaves no message, offers no solution; but he presents problems inherent in the aborigine (sic) situation in a manner in which contemporary formal trends, and Boyd's own tradition of poetic representation, combine to a successful climax of nearly twenty years of artistic endeavour.[129]

What is interesting is the absence here in the late 1950s, of any social or politically aware critique of the time. In the art world of Melbourne, this was barely conceivable. Bernard Smith had acknowledged Boyd's quest to present the universal dilemma of humanity: succeeding in "elevating an Australian theme to a universal level, endowing it with a breadth of reference and feeling beyond the limits of nation or reason...His apprehension of tragedy is indirect. He is muffled by allegory and enters into the spirit of suffering without bitterness".[130] There eventually followed, however, a range of seemingly profound art-historical critiques.

Margaret Plant considers that the *Bride* series is Boyd's entrance, albeit clumsy, into allegorical painting. She links the *Bride* series to Boyd's own work of the 1940s

and 1950s - retrieval and self-quotation - but it also "bears the mark of its period at mid-twentieth century".

> This is evident not only in the imprint of Chagall, widely admired in Australia at that time, but in the marks of a wider Australian search for effective, stirring painting - a kind of expressionist history painting with a mythology half way between the known and the invented. The challenge was to attack the entrenched tradition of pastoral landscape and to oppose the rising tide of abstraction.[131]

The 1959 Antipodean Exhibition and the Manifesto that accompanied it were symptomatic of this situation, but Plant argues,

> the yearning for expressiveness was a wider phenomenon". *The Bride* series has "a pertinence within a philosophical or psychological network of mid-century discourses. Boyd's work easily bears interpretations that are existentialist - concerned with the ostracized *L'Etranger* as a condition of life, gravitating to Freudian paradigms of repression, fantasy, narcissism, melancholia and mourning. Unavoidable in the 1980s application, at least in most general outline, of Jacques Laçan's notion of *L'Autre*: the other that is both sexually and racially apart, locked in the pursuit of desire - of love or of whiteness. It may be possible to claim, thirty years after the painting of the *Bride*, that the theme of the Other is the unifying theme in Boyd's work."[132]

In 1987, Margaret Plant believed that the 'Australianness' of Boyd's *Bride* works was incidental to the concern with symbolic mythologies. For her racism is not the central issue.[133]

A further fifteen years has passed since Margaret Plant's *Reading Boyd's Bride Thirty Years Later*. Given that Boyd's initial impetus for this dramatic series was the plight of the dispossessed Indigenous inhabitants of Central Australia in 1951, and now with the passage of time the awareness in Australian society of the truth about white Australia's treatment of the Aborigines, the analysis of how Boyd as an artist with a social commitment perceived victims in this context is a useful gauge for measuring

gradual changes in Australian social attitudes. Far from denying formal artistic concerns or personal motives and ideals, a fresh analysis can now position Boyd in all authenticity as one artist who was both the product, like many others, of the ignorant and abusive society into which he was born; and as also one victim of government deviousness in withholding the true scale of ethnic inequality and maltreatment of Aboriginal society, Australia's native inhabitants. But also, Boyd exposed unwittingly in such paintings, by his mind-searing imagery, and on subsequent insight and reflection, the full dimension of this humanitarian tragedy on a universally recognisable plane. Human guilt, for Boyd, bore down on his subsequent *oeuvre* at any rate, inspiring arguably the greatest paintings in twentieth century Australian art. Boyd would in due course accept Peter Fuller's verdict, that there could be no redemption for humanity given his own personal conviction. All this stemmed from the tragic journey to the Simpson Desert in 1951.[134]

ENDNOTES CHAPTER3

[1] Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* Allen Lane, Penguin, Melbourne, 1981, p. vii.

[2] Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting, 1788-1970*(1962) Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford and Melbourne, 1971, p. 287.

[3] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

[5] My first discussions with Noel Counihan were at the Canberra School of Art when he was an Artist in Residence at the Australian National University and I was a Lecturer in Art History (1982). The following year when I studied at the University of Melbourne (MA Preliminary Year, Fine Arts) I took part in the curating of an exhibition, as part of that course, at the University of Melbourne Gallery entitled "Images of Women"; I chose the work of Noel Counihan and carried out formal interviews with him. In 1985 I was commissioned to write a study of contemporary drawing in Australia, (*Drawing in Australia: Images and Ideas*, MacMillan, Australia, 1986) I included Counihan and interviewed him. In the same year I was commissioned to write a monograph: *Noel Counihan*, Kangaroo Press (Sydney) (published 1986) which involved working closely with the artist, in interviews and on archives.

[6] Arthur Boyd, Letter to Franz Philipp, Franz Philipp Papers, University of Melbourne, 4 January 1966. In this letter and others to Philipp at the editing stage of *The Art of Arthur Boyd*(2000) for Thames and Hudson, London, Boyd listed as his friends and influences: Bergner, Vasilieff, John and Sunday Reed, Albert Tucker and his wife Joy Hester, his cousins Robin and Pat Boyd, Wilfred McCulloch, Max Nicholson. Counihan is not mentioned.

[7] Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan, Artist and Revolutionary*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[9] Haese, R., *op. cit.*

[10] Smith, B., *op. cit.*, p. 551.

[11] Haese, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[12] Brenda Niall, *Martin Boyd: a Life*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1998.

[13] Haese, R., *op. cit.*

[14] See Peter Herbst, "At Open Country Cottage in the 1940s" , in Patricia Dobrez and Peter Herbst, *The Art of the Boyds, Generations of Artistic Achievement*, Bay Books, Sydney and London, 1990, pp. 198-201.

[15] In a letter to Albert Tucker, 22 June 1948, Richard Haese, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

[16] In 1981 I reviewed Richard Haese's *Rebels and Precursors*, *op. cit.*, for *Labour History*, Canberra, 1981 and spoke to Haese (who lectured at the Canberra School of Art that June), and also to Professor Peter Herbst (Philosophy, ANU) and Counihan the following year.

[17] Bernard Smith, Letter to Janet McKenzie, July 1990.

[18] See Franz Philipp, *op.cit.*, Chapter II, pp. 31-40.

[19] Haese, R., *op. cit.*, p. 269.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 269-270.

[21] Peter Fuller in "Arthur Boyd - Interview with Peter Fuller", *Modern Painters*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Summer 1990, London, p. 22.

[22] Arthur Boyd, *Ibid.*, p. 22.

[23] George Steiner, *Errata*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1997; also J. Cowley, "A Traveller in the Realm of the Mind", Interview with George Steiner, *The Times*, September 22, 1997, p. 19.

[24] The Rembrandt *Self-Portrait* in the National Gallery of Victoria is now said to be an Eighteenth Century forgery. "Nevertheless, this work has a tremendous influence on Boyd's dark portraits (1945-46) ... In particular the brilliant *Self-Portrait* which I think is the greatest of all Australian self-portraits because it tells you everything". Barry Pearce, Curator of Australian Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Letter to Janet McKenzie, September, 1999.

[25] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

[26] Peter Herbst, , *op.cit.*, pp. 198-201.

[27] *The Temptation of St Anthony*, pen and brush drawing in maroon on brown paper, 216 x 238 mm signed and dated at bottom left "Breughel 1556" (of doubtful authenticity, may be later reproduction of authentic signature), Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, preparatory drawing for an engraving.

[28] *Big Fish Eats Little Fish* pen drawing in dark grey on paper, 216 x 302 mm, signed and dated at bottom right: "1556/breughel", Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina. This is an elaboration of motifs from Bosch.

[29] Brueghel acknowledges his debt to Bosch for in the first edition of the engraving by Pieter van der Heyden for which this drawing by Breughel was a preparatory work, the name of H. Bosch appears as "the inventor". "But the work's overall conception

is typical of Breughel and his ability to translate metaphorical language into images" Alexander Wied, *Bruegel*, Studio Vista, London, 1979, p. 21.

[30] Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and their Use in Painting, with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*, first published in 1921:

> Since its first appearance in 1921, *The Materials of the Artist* has enjoyed a deserved reputation with artists in many countries. It has become a standard work in many art schools and academics, and the accepted authority on questions of materials and technique. Many painters have even acknowledged its power to stimulate a desire towards creative painting. The work presents in condensed form, lectures which the author gave for nearly twenty-five years at the Academy of Fine Arts at Munich. Max Doerner states in his Preface: 'only a complete mastery of the materials will give that firm foundation on which the artist may develop an individual style and which at the same time will insure the durability and permanency of his creations.'

Publisher's statement on the dustjacket on Revised Edition, George G. Harrap and Co. London, 1949.

[31] This is cataloguedby Franz Philipp as number 3.10.

[32] Luke Chapter 15, verses 18-24, Revised Standard Version:

> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he rose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again;he was lost, and is found'.

Oxford University Press, London, p. 1105.

[33] *Exodus*, Chapter 19, verse 8, *ibid.*, p. 77.

[34] *Exodus*, Chapter 32, verses 3-4, *ibid.*, p. 92.

[35] *Exodus*, Chapter 32, verses 19-20, *ibid.*, p. 92.

[36] *Exodus*, Chapter 32, verse 26, *ibid.*, p. 93.

[37] *Exodus*, Chapter 32, verse 35, *ibid.*, p. 93.

[38] *Exodus*, Chapter 32, verse 28, *ibid.*, p. 93.

[39] Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990.

[40] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.* p. 43.

[41] Robert Davidson, *The Old Testament*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1964, p. 225.

[42] Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, *Mars*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1988.

[43] Tom Rosenthal, "Introduction", *Retrospective Exhibition of Paintings, Drawings and Other Works by Arthur Boyd*, Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, 1969, no pagination.

[44] Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990.

[45] Robert Hughes, "Fear and Yearning", *Time*, New York, 1994, pp. 60-62.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

[47] Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] Paul Gauguin, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, 1888, (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh)

[51] Smith, B. *Australian Painting, op. cit.*, p. 284.

[52] John Reed, "Arthur Boyd in a Personal Reaction and Career", *Ern Malley's Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4, November 1954, p. 31.

[53] John Reed, "Nolan's Kelly Paintings", *Art and Australia*, Vol. 5, No. 2, September 1967, p. 443.

[54] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[55] Christopher Tadgell, "Introduction", *Merric Boyd Drawings*, Seeker and Warburg London, 1975, no pagination.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 144.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[58] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 148.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 149.

[61] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[62] Martin Boyd, *The Cardboard Crown*, Cressett Press, London, 1952, p. 17.

[63] Max Doerner, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-219:

> Casein Tempera: Casein has been used since the earliest recorded beginnings of art. Fresh white curd, the casein of good skim milk, is a crumbly, soft substance which, if ground on a plate with the addition of about one-fifth its volume of slaked lime, becomes liquid. In that form it can easily be emulsified, like egg, and

> it can then be thinned with water. Casein is the strongest glue, used for centuries by joiners and cabinet makers who require a glue that will stand up out of doors.
>
> The casein should be prepared fresh each day, which can be done in two or three minutes . . . There is nothing better to paint with on a wall than casein made in this way . . .

40 grams of casein are first mixed with very little water, then 250 millilitre moderately warm water is added.

[64] Arthur Boyd, Interview with Janet McKenzie, Italy, 1990.

[65] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[66] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.* p. 150.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

[68] Peter Fuller, "New Foreword", *Images of God*, (2nd edition), Hogarth Press, London, 1990, p. xiv.

[69] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

[70] Deborah Edwards, "The Ceramics", *Arthur Boyd Retrospective Catalogue*, AGNSW, 1993, p. 169.

[71] Arthur Boyd interview with Deborah Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[74] Peter Herbst, "Reflections on the Murrumbeena Experience", *The Art of the Boyds, op. cit.* p. 200.

[75] Geoffrey Edwards, *The Painter as Potter: Decorated Ceramics of the Murrumbeena Circle*, National Gallery of Victoria, 1982, quoted by Edwards, p. 170.

[76] Arthur Boyd interview with Deborah Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

[77] *Ibid.*, pp. 170-171.

[78] Arthur Boyd interview with Deborah Edwards, *ibid.*, p. 175.

[79] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[81] Franz Philipp, *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria*, Vol. ix, No. 1, 1995, quoted *ibid.*, p. 73.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 76.

[83] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Canberra, 1993.

[84] Deborah Edwards, *op. cit.* p. 174.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

[86] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

[87] Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, London (1949), 1976, p. 33.

[88] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Canberra, 1993.

[89] Alexander Wied, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-103.

[90] Brenda Niall, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 157.

[92] Arthur Boyd letter to Joseph Brown, 12 March 1966, Joseph Brown Papers, Melbourne.

[93] Joseph Brown letter to Arthur Boyd, Joseph Brown Papers, Melbourne, 22 July 1966.

[94] Joseph Brown letter to Arthur Boyd, 22 December 1967, Joseph Brown Papers, Melbourne.

[95] Peter Read, *A Rape of the Soul So Profound*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1999 is a collection of articles, pamphlets and submissions written by Read between 1976 and 1998. Read worked as historian of Aboriginal Australia since the 1970s. All writings in this volume concern, those Aboriginal people who were removed from their familie while children and raised apart from their Indigenous inheritance. He wrote about this practice long before it was even talked about; it is a powerful and passionate collection of writings which makes "a major contribution to understanding what the Stoler Generations mean". (Henry Reynolds. Also see Henry Reynolds, *Aboriginal Sovereignty, Three Nations, One Australia?, Reflections on Race, State and Nation*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996.

[96] *Bringing Them Home. The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, (President Ronald Wilson), Sydney, April 1997, pp. 27-28.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[100] Arthur Boyd interviewed by Grazia Gunn, *Seven Persistent Images, op. cit.*, p. 56.

[101] Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting, op. cit.*, p. 2.

[102] *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[104] Noel Counihan interview with Janet McKenzie, 10 July 1985.

[105] Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd, op. cit.*, p. 49.

[106] So too did Franz Philipp, for the sake of brevity, however, rather than political correctness, see p. 83.

[107] Nicholas Usherwood, *You Beaut Country. A Selection of Australian Art, 1940-2000* 3 - 26 October, 2001, Agnew's, London, no pagination.

[108] *Ibid.*

[109] Arthur Boyd, interviewed by Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[110] *Ibid.* Boyd also expressed the view that he should have made tougher or stronger images on the subject of the Aborigines when I interviewed him in September 1990 i his studio in Italy.

[111] Counihan had met Albert Namatjira at a dinner party in Melbourne in February 1954. Namatjira sat opposite him and Counihan sketched his portrait. Smith, Noel Counihan, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

[112] *Tribune*, 1 April 1959. Counihan Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

[113] *Ibid.*

[114] Typescript of "Foreign Literature" article, August 1961, Counihan Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] Boyd includes a number of Aboriginal figures in his Bundanon paintings of the 1980s where the relationship with the land is emphasised.

[117] Tom Rosenthal, Manuscript for *The Art of Sidney Nolan*, to be published by Thames and Hudson in May, 2002, p. 131.

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 133.

[119] Smith, *Australian Painting* p. 326.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

[121] For an analysis of the Sydney response to Boyd's Bride paintings, see Geoffrey Dutton, *The Innovators*, MacMillan Australia, Melbourne, 1986.

[122] Smith, *Australian Painting op. cit.*, pp. 326-327.

[123] See Haese, *op. cit.*, Chapter Three: "Democracy and Modernism, The Contemporary Art Society and the Popular Front". *The Herald* Exhibition of 1939, pp. 61-65.

[124] Smith, *Australian Painting* p. 324.

[125] In his discussion of *Bridegroom Waiting for his Bride to Grow Up*, Franz Philipp states, "This painting more than any other suggests to me an awareness of Chagall", p. 92. But in his footnote he then states, "On the whole I believe that the influence of Chagall on the*Bride* series has been strongly overstressed", p. 146. As in the borrowing from Breughel's,*The Gloomy Day*, Philipp is ill at ease with admitting the extent of Boyd's dependence on other artists and art of the past, for fear that it will compromise his presentation of Boyd as a "lone genius".

[126] Margaret Plant, "Reading Boyd's Bride Thirty Years Later", *Art and Australia*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Sydney, Winter 1987, p. 492.

[127] Arthur Boyd recalled: "... I had made drawings of churches with aboriginal people standing outside and half-castes in wedding gowns and aboriginal shearers and cattlemen playing cards. It was not until much later that I put them together and made paintings out of these drawings, these notes - they were barely even drawings". (Biographical Notes for John Hetherington, 1961) Franz Philipp Papers, University of Melbourne.

[128] See Peter Read, *op. cit.*, p. 169: "While all the post-war advancement organisations were devoted to education, welfare or political progress, none to my knowledge adopted the plank of ending the child separation policy. Few manifestos even mentioned it. Perhaps the whites' own lack of comprehension of the extent of the policy and the cruelty of its execution helped to prevent separation from entering the agenda of serious political intention."

[129] Ursula Hoff, "The Paintings of Arthur Boyd", *Meanjin*, xvii, 1958, pp. 143-147.

[130] Smith, *Australian Painting* p. 325.

[131] Plant, M., *op. cit.*, p. 494.

[132] *Ibid.*, p. 495.

[133] See Christine Dixon and Terry Smith, Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting, 1942-1962, Dreams, Fears, Desires, The Power Institute of Fine Art, University of Sydney, 1984.

[133] This issue is explored more fully in a discussion of the mutually beneficial friendship between critic Peter Fuller and Arthur Boyd, cut short by Fuller's death in 1990, in Chapter Nine of this study.

PART III: EUROPEAN SOURCES : WORD AND IMAGE

CHAPTER FOUR

London : Art Historical : Literary

In the late 1940s, after the immobility forced on people by the war, there was a marked exodus of artists and writers mainly to England[1]. Australian artists were largely dependent on art in reproduction and felt the need to experience art in Europe first-hand. The Boyd family had a tradition of constant travel between Europe and Australia as can be observed in Martin Boyd's books *A Single Flame* (London, 1939), or *Day of My Delight* (Melbourne, 1965).

As we have seen the developmental post-war period was a vital stage in Boyd's career and one of great productivity, artistically. The work done between 1945 and 1958 established his reputation in Australia as one of its leading artists. It was not until November 1959 therefore that Arthur Boyd left with his family for England, wanting to address a wider audience and to experience European art at first hand.[2] This trip was intended to last for a period of a few months but soon became indefinitely extended.

The timing of Boyd's visit to England was most fortunate for as we have seen there had occurred a considerable interest in Australian art stimulated by such influential figures as Sir Kenneth Clark. In 1960 the Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Bryan Robertson visited Australia — sponsored by the British Council — to select art works for an exhibition at the Whitechapel in 1961. Such was the impact of Boyd's work on a number of key individuals, he was offered a one-man showing at the Zwemmer Gallery in July/August 1960 and a retrospective at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1962.[3] For the latter he painted more than sixty new paintings.[4] Boyd's reception in London was very positive, critically speaking. Terence Mullaly looking at new work since the highly successful *Bride* series at Zwemmer, noticed something even newer:

> He has become less concerned with the content of each picture, more with the actual handling of paint . . . Those new paintings, and they are very large, are fascinating. The colour is lovely and the strange creatures in them compelling.[5]

To fully comprehend the duality, between the conscience-stricken *Bride* series, and the lush landscapes deliberately selected instead for the 1958 Venice Biennial by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, one must also understand how the latter board were pilloried for rejecting the *Bride* series by leading Australian critics, for a combination of Streetons and softer Boyd landscapes.

Boyd arrived in London late in 1959 with support from his Australian dealer Tam Purves of Australian Galleries, Melbourne.[6] But very soon after he was self-supporting following the Zwemmer sales. Bryan Robertson's selection of Boyd works for the 1962 Whitechapel retrospective ran to 151 paintings, eight large drawings and sixteen ceramic tiles. The market was agog, and the media attended in droves.[7]

There came an imperceptible lull after the great success of the Zwemmer exhibition. It was a pause to grasp his new situation and the due recognition he had so wanted when in Melbourne. Now he went on to develop yet another varied body of work. *Bride with Lover* (*Bride Turning into a Windmill*) (1960), is an important painting which marks Boyd's departure from the main body of *Bride* paintings. The Aboriginal bridegroom has all but vanished into a black pool. The background reads like a stage-set for there is little depth in the trees. The bride hovers like an elongated insect, her veil whirring segmentally like a windmill. Her human facial qualities are minimal; now she inhabits a world that is both mechanistic and insect-like. This painting seems to mark the abandonment of the vanishing Aboriginal groom, of whom only a glimmer of an eye and the toes of a disappearing foot remain. Almost cinematically Boyd has faded out the ill-fated couple. This painting emerged from a final "epilogue" group of late works in the series, that included *Bridegroom in a Black Creek, Drowned Bridegroom* (1958-59), and *Reflected Bride* (1958) **(5.1)**. In 1960 Boyd painted *Lovers by a Creek* (1960) **(5.2)**.

It reveals the clear new direction of Boyd's ideas and represents the departure into a more harmonious painted environment. This arcadia turns out to be the setting in further paintings now for emergent mythologies.

Lovers in a Landscape (1960) **(5.5)**, reveals the couple in close embrace in spite of the threatening black ram in the middle centre of the landscape, while a sharp beaked bird plucks at the bride's extended dress. By 1962 the transition was complete. The forest is the typical forest of medieval legend since the Middle Ages, and a sense of classical myth pervades. There is a newer confidence in the works at this stage, the artist had become extraordinarily prolific, stimulated by the success of his exhibitions in terms of sales and critical recognition and perhaps an awareness that he was working within an ancient European tradition, with many historic master works closer at hand in the National Gallery in London.

Boyd's passion for the Old Masters first nurtured in the Art Room, in the State Library in Melbourne, was now to be endlessly satisfied by direct study of originals instead of reproductions. He travelled to Italy and to the great museums on the Continent. In London the National Gallery provided splendid examples of such works that he had hitherto only studied at second hand. The achievements of the post-war Biblical paintings and the original conscience-stricken *Bride* series, as well as an ever-expanding technical repertoire meant that by the time Boyd was able to study the works in their original form, he had the maturity and confidence to be inspired to a most remarkable level of artistic expression. Boyd's Aboriginal bride and groom were transformed into lovers; the lovers in turn become nudes. A major source for this transition by Boyd was the painting by Piero di Cosimo (c.1462-1515) in London's National Gallery, *The Death of Procris*.[8] **(10.18)**

There evidently were few paintings of nudes in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and yet the nude is central to the European artistic tradition;[9] and Boyd responded to the expressive powers that it evoked. He had long been interested in lovers, images of vulnerability and innocence (in marked contrast to the evil ways of the world) — Boyd now found in

the nude, endless possibilities. An immediate response was in the field of metamorphosis to which he had successfully resorted during the war years both in drawings and paintings.[10] Enabling a powerful metaphoric and symbolic energy to be invested in his works Boyd uses the purity of form in the nude to display the remarkable and extraordinary aspect of mythology and animal life creating some of the most elegant and powerful erotic images in Australian art. Boyd's attraction to Piero di Cosimo related to his interest in the primitive and the macabre.

In a perceptive passage of critique, Ursula Hoff has commented:

> Piero modifies the normative poses of quattrocento art and depicts his animals and the estuary setting with a rare acuteness of observation. Unlike Breughel and Rembrandt, who had caught Boyd's attention earlier, or Titian, who was soon to occupy him, Piero di Cosimo was not one of the most acclaimed masters of his time, but he was its *unicum*. 'He loved to see everything wild', wrote Vasari. Piero's most memorable works are a series of pictures showing the development of man from an animal state to an early form of primitive civilisation. Consciously or unconsciously Boyd felt the attraction of this streak of primitivism, the slightly macabre association of eroticism and death in Piero's paintings.[11]

Boyd's nudes **(5.10-5.15)** undergo various transformations and are central to his imagination during this period. He described the process in 1961 thus:

> [They are] Nudes in Australian landscapes. They have become more identified with the bush or with the countryside, mixed up with dead wood . . . The nudes look a bit like frogs. The paintings begin to emerge as being related in some ways to the origins of man in a primeval sort of way; they are very disjointed . . . and almost acrobatic. They are watched sometimes by frogs, sometimes by red dogs . . . They [the pictures] are "about" people turning into animals or else emerging, coming out from being animals . . . a sort of mutation takes place. I have painted Nudes flying over mud banks of red earth in the depth of the bush, flying or diving into deep black pools with gold fish swimming around them . . . Women turning into fireflies or vice versa; hovering over black landscapes with quickly rushing water.[12]

In many of these works the unlikely juxtaposition of animals, elements of nature (e.g. water) and sexual union reveals Boyd's belief in the fundamental link between sexual love and the creative survival of individuals. The dead figure in Piero's painting has an ethereal quality and its death is evoked by an almost

translucent skin and weightlessness. The biblical episode of the *Assumption* with figures being elevated towards the sky was included in the Grange murals and in the *Bride* series; the special effects of levitation and weightlessness are realised to great effect.

> Boyd's 'recumbent' nudes of 1961 lie — or rather have fallen — on their side like Piero's dead Procris, in a frontal view of full exposure, a pose which in classical art denoted the abandonment of death rather than erotic allurement.[13]

Boyd's imagery is enigmatic; in the floating figures the spiritual dimension of life is implied with great delicacy, but in the nude Boyd found endless possibilities (formal and conceptual) and so he experimented constantly at this period. In printmaking (discussed in the next Chapter), he made a large number of images of varying mood and intensity. In the organisation and manipulation of the etching plate he invested the two dimensional space with a rare degree of energy by the employment of deep dry point lines and aquatinted arabesques.

The second art historical source for Boyd in London in the early 1960s was the great painting by Titian, *The Death of Actaeon* which was at this time on loan from Harewood House to the National Gallery, London.[14] The floating, ethereal quality inspired by Piero di Cosimo gave way to greater movement and drama after his close examination and admiration of the Titian masterpiece. Diana is the virgin goddess who lives with her nymphs in the woods. In the mythological story, the hunter Actaeon was walking his dogs in the wood when he came upon the beautiful Diana and her maidens bathing naked in a pool. Taken aback Actaeon stops to look — infuriating Diana. She retaliates and punishes Actaeon for his voyeurism by casting a spell which turns him into a stag. In the Titian painting Diana is portrayed with a bow and arrow while Actaeon's dogs who no longer recognise him, attack and kill him.

The *Nude with Beast* paintings **(5.8,5.9)** which were created in response to Titian's painting display a recognition of the duality that exists in sexual rituals.

Boyd attempted to create images that acknowledged the inherent paradoxes in the rituals of courtship and the dynamics of the sexual act. Using images from the natural world — bestial acts of fornication and metamorphosis — Boyd sought to illustrate that in human relationships there sometimes existed an uncomfortable blend of tender desire and ethereal love and the desire for power and domination. Opposite emotions co-exist in Boyd's *Nude* paintings of this period creating a disquieting tension and theatricality.

Although *Girl Asleep in a Stream* (1960) **(5.1)**, takes as its cue, classical images of Venus, it has been completely re-invented in a contemporary manner. No longer an image of ideal beauty Boyd's nudes can be interpreted from the view that they represent perceptive images of twentieth century woman: at once the vulnerable victim (no arms denote her defencelessness) and the autonomous individual whose identity is not wholly dependent on the status of her sexual partnership. The nude's environment is informed by surrealist images of the subconscious. The female figures are at once innocent and seductive; independent, feminine and unattainable. The male figure in *Sleeping Nude* to the right appears angst-ridden in the voyeuristic pose, powerless and motionless before this inaccessible figure. An element of autobiography possibly exists in the puzzling tension in this work, that of an identification of the artist with his father. For, following the birth of their fifth child (which caused complications) Merric and Doris Boyd were advised that for medical reasons they should not have any more children. To avoid further pregnancy, the couple, still in their thirties, chose the somewhat extreme solution of celibacy.[15] The resultant tension between them as a couple must have created an acute degree of anxiety for their sensitive, eldest son. The termination of that aspect of their marriage precipitated an intensification of the effects of Merric's epilepsy.[16] Thwarted physical love in his father, with whom he identified, suggests that Arthur Boyd's preoccupation with copulating couples rose out of a need to resolve an inner tension that dated back to childhood.

During the war Boyd used metamorphosis in painting to emphasise the fluid relationship between the passionate violence that man was capable of and bestiality. He continued to develop the same theme in the 1960s *Nudes* and *Nude with Shark-headed Beast* **(see also 6.14)** (etching, drypoint, aquatint). Human and animal behaviour interact in Boyd's erotic images as do guilt and a pervasive lack of fulfilment. In subsequent series of works, for example, the *Narcissus* etchings (published 1984), and the *Lysistrata* (1970) etchings the erotic language is extended and made more explicit, for example, garlanded penises and a range of sexual activities in the *Narcissus* suite of 1984.[17]

The passion and energy in the mythological paintings of 1962 (as well as the graphic work and the *Elektra* backdrops for Robert Helpmann's ballet at Covent Garden) was now intensified by adopting a vital expressive directional device from Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* **(10.23)**: the diagonal thrust of energy across the picture plane. In Titian's great work, movement is created by the huntress as she rushes, bow in hand, from the left of the composition. The thrust of her body (a movement with male sexual connotations and domination) leads the eye across the canvas from her own figure to those of the dogs attacking Actaeon. Such dynamism brings into question traditional sexual politics, for here Actaeon is punished for his voyeurism by Diana. However, Diana is haunted by her retaliation and is punished by Boyd by the removal of her (the nude's) arms. The conflict inevitably creates suffering for both parties echoing the message of the classical myth but in a new and contemporary manner.

> Boyd has always been an eclectic artist and even some of his persistent images originated in borrowings. Before the 1970s, however, his quotations from the Old Masters were allied in large part with his use of grand themes. They were the artist's means of legitimising and transcending individual experience — of casting it on a universal plane.[18]

The *Nude and Beast* paintings and prints are based on the story of Diana and Actaeon, specifically with Titian's rendering of it. The painting carries with it

a message that pertains to convey the scene of suffering and punishment, of human fallibility and temptation. In the first painting of the group: *Nude with Beast I*, the impact of Titian is not found in strong evidence; the figures float in a metamorphic manner alluding to the changes possible in nature and the imagination and the power of sexual fantasy. As the series was developed, however, Boyd created remarkable dramas between individuals but with a wider universal message. The sensuality of paint application shows the painter's physical involvement in the creation of the great works. Titian's elegant drama also enters Boyd's large canvas *Frog, Falling Nude and Dog* (1961-62), which is a most vicious and enigmatically rendered drama. Boyd does not re-tell the mythological story in a literal manner but uses it to trigger endless juxtaposed images, always demonstrating that the art work whilst paying homage to classical, literary images and taking art historical sources as inspiration, must be the product as well of his own imagination and experience. The paintings must stand on their own as autonomous works of art.

The paintings by Boyd that were inspired by Titian's *The Death of Actaeon* are more specifically painterly and sensual than previous works. He also completed a series of paintings on plexiglass in the early sixties as part of his broader experimentation with different media; they have a great fluidity of movement and the colour is luminous and expressive. They are new interpretations of a number of the images from the 1940s but the medium gives new life to them and the glossy sheen creates a similar effect to Boyd's ceramic paintings which he resumed in London and exhibited at Zwemmer Gallery in October 1963. Rosenthal has described them as "akin to glazed frescoes"[19] sensual, rich colour intensified by the glazing process. Reviewing the ceramic paintings in 1963 in *The Arts Review* one commentator focused his attention on Boyd's interpretation of the Diana and Actaeon myth:

> Actaeon, it will be remembered . . . surprised Diana while she was bathing. She changed him into a stag, that is from predator into prey, and then in her *persona* as Diana the Huntress, set her dogs upon him, who tore him to

> pieces. Here classical and Boydian mythology diverge, for whereas in the original myth the hounds were but the instruments of justice, inflicting a punishment suitable for a mere man gazing upon the naked splendour of the goddess; in the Boydian version, Diana loves Actaeon, and, relenting too late for having herself shot him, she, by a further miracle becomes one with the beloved.[20]

In the same year (1963) as the ceramic painting exhibition at Zwemmers Boyd received a most welcome break in the form of a commission to design sets and costumes for Robert Helpmann's ballet *Elektra*. The designs are discussed in relation to his graphic work of this period in the next chapter. Of immediate relevance here is the remarkable degree of recognition that Boyd managed to achieve in less than four years in London and the exceptional output of work in terms of imagery, technique and media in view of broad and enthusiastic public acceptance of his energetic talent and vision.

To commemorate the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of William Shakespeare an exhibition was to be organised. The organiser, Richard Buckle admired Boyd's *Elektra* backdrops **(6.11-6.14)** (in his review "Helpmann in a Blaze", *The Sunday Times*, 31 March, 1963) as well as his ceramic paintings at the Zwemmer Gallery. Buckle commissioned Boyd to contribute to the Shakespeare Exhibition images on the great love story *Romeo and Juliet*.

Franz Philipp commented:

> one's familiarity with Boydian iconography tends to mislead one at first into thinking that the artist was very little concerned with the text of Shakespeare's play; that he interpreted the story of the star-crossed lovers almost entirely in terms of personal, idiosyncratic images.[21]

Boyd's imagery here can, of course, be traced from earlier paintings and drawings; this can be seen as a natural progression from the work he had done in the 1940s ("hammock lovers") and also from the paintings, etchings and ceramic painting that he had been working on in London already. **(5.13,5.14,5.15)** The technically-skilled application of the glaze shares the supreme purity and delicacy achieved by his pastel works. But Boyd's response to the text is nonetheless

considered and authentic. He uses words in *Romeo and Juliet* to conjure visual associations:

> But soft what light through yonder window breaks?
> It is the east and Juliet is the sun!
> Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon.

Juliet and the sun almost touch, indeed Boyd establishes a special relationship between them by enveloping the element (sun) and the figure (Juliet) with a darker presence (the blue sky). As a visual device it is highly successful; as a metaphoric device it speaks with a tenderness and passion, that borders on the spiritual and makes for an allusion to their imminent death.

The "hammock lovers" in the *Romeo and Juliet* **(5.18)** polyptych possess a sublime quality that is created by the simplicity of the composition, deploying a perfected image aided now by great insight. It is an image of perfect love, possessing an ethereal quality that one experiences more commonly in music. As a polyptych the quality of these images is wholly consistent and in Boyd's evocation of love, suffering and tragedy he has rarely surpassed before or since the emotional quality of these works. They can in technical achievement (although in different media) and in working method be compared to the *St. Francis of Assisi* series that Boyd developed towards the end of the 1960s where too, the written word was the source for Boyd's images. In both *Romeo and Juliet* and *St. Francis of Assisi*, Boyd identified with literary and historic characters. Both involved detailed readings from inspiring and famous texts. Boyd was not daunted by the task but absorbed the sources with the same passion as that with which he studied the paintings of the Old Masters in the European collections.

In conclusion, word and image were Boyd's first major sources in Australia as a young artist: Breughel then gave him cripples, "world landscapes" and a framework for a world possessed; from Bosch came grotesque images of evil with spectacular attention to detail. Rembrandt gave him monumental figures and great

insight in portraiture and self-reflection. In Van Gogh, Rouault, Blake, Kokoschka and most importantly Chagall, Boyd absorbed qualities and devices with great technical skill. In London his love and admiration for the paintings of Piero di Cosimo and Titian precipitated an astonishingly prolific output. And later still, Boyd was to draw upon the works of artists as diverse as Sassetta, Giotto, Chardin, Cézanne and he did so unashamedly, eclectically and with great enthusiasm.

A love and respect for literature, nurtured in childhood and upbringing also influenced his work. The written word was both the source of pleasure and gave regular and systematic inspiration. Boyd claimed a poetic licence to re-create images and ideas for himself. For example, from Dostoyevsky in the late 1930s with whom he identified in describing his father's epilepsy, as from the Bible and classical mythology Boyd's artistic career reveals a succinct, random catalogue of fascinating and varied sources drawn from literature and art. It was also a perfectly natural development in his career that he should spend periods of time on collaborative projects that would further focus his empathy and appreciation selectively for great art and literature of the past or contemporary poetry, always on specific projects.

ENDNOTES:

[1] Ian Britain's *Once an Australian. Journeys with Barry Humphries, Clive James, Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes* is a brilliant study of Australian expatriates. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997.

[2] Arthur Boyd interview with Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

"I don't think I went because I was disillusioned. I wanted to see the painting, the actual painting, that was the prime reason. To some extent going to England was trying to find roots. Place is very important and I know that Wiltshire was where the family started off from."

[3] "When I showed my pictures to Anton Zwemmer he was very pleased with them. He asked the prices. I said they were two hundred pounds or thereabouts. He said, 'You can't charge that sort of price, that's terrible!' I said, 'I can get that price for a landscape that takes me half the time that it takes to paint an Aboriginal picture.' So he agreed and he sold the lot; he was very pleased." *Ibid.*, p.59

[4] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[5] Terence Mullaly, "Boyd Show a Rare Chance to trace Artist's Style", *Daily Telegraph*, London, July 13, 1962.

[6] Tam Purves, the founder of the Australian Galleries in Melbourne, guaranteed Arthur Boyd twenty pounds a week for six months while he visited England. In return Boyd supplied Purves with "x-number of pictures. We took a mortgage out on the house for the fare; we went and stayed for twenty-one years." Arthur Boyd interview with Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

[7] Reviews included:

Terence Mullaly, "Boyd Show a Rare Chance to trace Artist's Style", *Daily Telegraph*, July 13, 1962.
Robert Wright, "The Boyd Prodigy", *The Tatler*, July 22, 1962.
Roger Berthoud, "The Strange World of Arthur Boyd", *Evening Standard*, June 29, 1962.
"An Australian Painter's Personal Vision", *The Times*, June 28, 1962.
George Butcher, "A Poignant Guilt", *The Guardian*, June 23, 1962.Tom Rosenthal, "Arthur Boyd, The Australian Vision", *Arts Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 12, 30 June – 14 July, 1962.

[8] "A Piero di Cosimo in the National Gallery turned into an enigma when the art historians decided that it couldn't be called *The Death of Procris*. Under its faintly absurd new title *Mythological Subject*, it has become a lucid dream with an enigmatic content, and seems more beautiful than ever." Robert Melville, "Introduction", *Arthur Boyd*, Fischer Fine Art, London, 1973.

[9] See Kenneth Clark, *The Nude*, John Murray, London 1956.

[10] References are made in the 1960s nudes to lovers paintings of the 1940s. Of particular relevance in this context is *Lovers in a Boat* (1944). Referring to a visit to Hastings on the Victorian coast he recalls:

> "I remember seeing a couple in a boat with black swans flying overhead, an image which deeply affected me and which I used several times. It suggested the idea of a death or threat: the black swan of trespass hovering over the lovers."
>
> Arthur Boyd interview with Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

[11] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[12] Arthur Boyd, "Biographical Note" (1961), quoted by Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[13] Franz Philipp, *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[14] Titian, (Active before 1511, died 1576).

[15] Christopher Tadgell, *Merric Boyd Drawings*, *op. cit.*, no pagination.

[16] *Ibid.*, no pagination.

[17] Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, *Narcissus*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1984.

[18] Felicity St. John Moore, "Arthur Boyd: Landscape and Tradition", *Studio International*, Vol. 199, No. 1015, 1986/1987, p. 20.

[19] Tom Rosenthal, *Arthur Boyd Ceramic Paintings*, Catalogue, London, 2 October 1963.

[20] Max Wykes-Joyce, "Arthur Boyd's Ceramic Paintings", *The Arts Review*, London, Vol. XV, No. 19, 5-19 October, 1963.

[21] Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

CHAPTER FIVE

Experimentation : Graphic Work

The 1960s were for Arthur Boyd's career characterised by a great interest in experimentation with alternative media such as pastel, printmaking and ceramic painting.[1] He had previously been a prolific draughtsman as the vast number of drawings done during the war years display. The large allegorical paintings of the 1940s were planned in sketches. In his twenties he was shown how to operate a printing press at the premises of *Smith's Weekly.*[2] In the late 1930s he did some experimental etchings in the studio of Jessie Traill, "a printmaker of considerable but virtually unknown achievement"[3] in Flinder's Street, Melbourne. Between 1944 and 1946 Boyd produced some twelve lithographs that were, both stylistically and thematically, closely related to his drawings of that period. In the early 1950s at the Melbourne Technical School he produced a number of lithographs. [4]

In London during 1962 and 1963 Boyd produced a series of thirty-seven drypoints, etchings and aquatints. His foray into printmaking was a significant development; for it soon began to occupy the position that drawing had in terms of being a laboratory for the development and expression of new ideas and the refinement of aesthetic qualities. The usual size was 10 x 12 inches or 12 x 14 inches. They were detailed and precise images and demonstrate that significant developments took place in Boyd's work in conceptual terms as and when he worked in various print media. It is useful to examine the developments on a technical and aesthetic level and also in terms of content and meaning. The single most important factor in this development is that Boyd chose to work with key individuals in a number of collaborative projects. Such projects I intend to show provided initial inspiration and sustained direction; they produced a plethora of new images for his work. The most influential individuals here in strict sequence were T.S.R. Boase, Oxford historian with a special interest in

Biblical figures and Medieval history and Peter Porter, Australian-born poet who also lived in London. The detailed nature of the projects with Boase and Porter extended Boyd's repertoire very greatly. He responded quickly and with originality to the subjects of *St. Francis of Assisi* (1968), *Nebuchadnezzar* (1972), *Jonah* (1973), *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975), *Narcissus* (1984) and *Mars* (1988). These are discussed in detail in the next chapter. The achievements of the projects themselves are impressive. However, it is in the manner in which through experimentation, in various graphic media, that Boyd rechargedhis already distinctive style and imagery that most concerns me. By revealingcertain elements in Boyd's creative process it is possible to discern what distinguished key works in his *oeuvre* from lesser works. Through an analysis of his most successful works, it is possible to demonstrate that he is an artist of international significance.

Naturally a number of Boyd's projects used drawing as their predominant medium. The book with Boase, *Nebuchadnezzar* in 1972, was illustrated with thirty-four paintings and eighteen drawings; *Jonah* in 1973 with Porter was predominantly drawings and *Mars* in 1988 was entirely drawing. While Boyd did not therefore abandon drawing in conventional media he himself considers that his etchings and lithographs are among his best drawings. He has described how he tended to "give more" to a drawing on an etching plate than on conventional paper. In printmaking in the 1960s there were for Boyd two periods of work: 1962-3 and 1968-9. He produced well over one hundred drypoint, aquatint and etched images. From each there would often be a number of state proofs. The state proofs are interesting in themselves, as the degree of variation between the images at the different stages is often very great. This is particularly so with the Self-Portraits. As a result, instead of there being some one hundred early etchings from the 1960s there are as many as three hundred images.[5] Between them there is also the expected range of quality that comes from an artist with increasingly sophisticated imagery working in a new medium. Although they are

not complicated from a technical point of view, Boyd enjoyed the privilegeof working with an assistant, John Hull. This enabled him to produce a greater number of works (having someone to assist in the laborious task of preparing plates and paper). He was therefore prolific. Further, he was freer to concentrate on aesthetic concerns having the support of a technical assistant. Boyd did not make elaborate images, from a technical point of view, but he found that the quality of the drypoint line, for example, possessed great dramatic potential. To this end he experimented with the use of a Stanley knife instead of a conventional burin to virtually pierce the plate with deep lines.[1] The jaggedfurry drypoint lines held a greater amount of ink, intensifying their effect by heightening the meaning of the images. It is the visual drama created that precipitated his choice of amplifying the drypoint and etched images in scale for the *Elektra* ballet backdrops in 1963, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The graphic strength of Boyd's strongest etched images from this period is exceptional. They laid the foundation for the poetic and elegant work in printmaking in collaborative projects. The general influence exerted by printmaking on Boyd's overall *oeuvre* has not previously been thoroughly explored. Individual articles such as Margaret Plant's on the *St. Francis of Assisi* lithographs are very useful, but no complete study has existed. All the suites of prints as well as the early prints of the sixties were part of the "Arthur Boyd Gift" (1975), to the National Gallery of Australia. The early experimental prints have not been exhibited *in toto* since they were given to the National Gallery and no definitive study of his work as a printmaker has been made. *Arthur Boyd Etching and Lithographs* with an Introduction by Imre von Maltzahn, was published in 1971 by Lund Humphries and the Maltzahn Gallery. It was a limited edition book (2000 copies) devoted to the "entire graphic work (with the exception of the St. Francis lithographs) produced between 1962 and 1969". The Introduction only gives a brief history of Boyd as an artist, and only the most cursory explanation of Boyd's printmaking during that time. Boyd's prints were titled for this

publication, yet this has only been done in an elementary and descriptive manner. At times this may give the impression that Boyd himself identified them thus at the time of production. It does not follow that had Boyd titled them specifically when he made them, that they would have titles alluding to greater meaning or significance. At times however, the titles read more like an inventory, than those belonging to a rich and varied body of work. For example, *Figure and Double-Headed Beast with Ram's Horns*, *Reclining Figure with Sun and Flying Lion*, and *Lovers below Brasso Tin*, hardly evoke the poetry or strength of the images.

Boyd's prints of the 1960s assume the same role as drawing did in the 1940s and they possess the same impatience and candour. Alan McCulloch described Boyd's drawings in 1951 as, "the gropings of a rare creative spirit impatient to express itself".[7] In relation to the inventory-style titles of his prints, Laurie Thomas' comments on Boyd's drawings are relevant:

> Whatever their form, there is no getting away from the sense that nearly all Boyd's drawings are private things, privately arrived at. The marvellous ebullience of someone loving unobserved. The very titles he gives them are offhand, not clues to what was in his mind, but references to odd features in them — a cane chair, a ram's head, an eye, a beak, an arrow. These are not titles but means of identification.[8]

In 1962 and 1963 Boyd's etchings were closely related to the *Nude and Beast* paintings he did after moving to London. *The Bride* series (1958-9), which was exhibited in London in 1960 at the Zwemmer Gallery, contained images of floating figures. Boyd's interest in metamorphosis is apparent in *Bridegroom in a Black Creek* (1960), where the bridegroom appears to become a water-sprite, "Vague associations with myth (Narcissus) and fairy-tale (the lure of the water and its sprites, male and female) are sounded".[9] Compared to *Mourning Bride I* (1958), a severe, hard-edged image resembling a collage, the 1960 painting is more unified and poetic. The lines in Boyd's paintings of 1960 have become more fluid, evocative of a sub-conscious

world. Boyd's metamorphosis is more overt in *Nude turning into a Dragonfly* (1961). The delicacy of *Lovers in a Landscape* (1961) **(5.5)**, prefigures the tenderness and subtlety achieved by a number of the St. Francis lithographs of St. Francis and St. Clare together.[10] When Boyd began his etchings he was creating images on the theme of thwarted love. The etching process encouraged this process, furthering this development and so extended his graphic repertoire. In the etchings Boyd's growing fascination with classical myth is in evidence. Boyd had alluded to classical mythology in his imagery although in the 1950s, but his move to London enabled him to encounter fine examples of the Italian Renaissance painting in the National Gallery. To paintings such as Piero di Cosimo's *Death of Procris* and Titian's *The Death of Acteon* he responded profoundly. A more detailed examination of these key paintings on Boyd's work has been made in Chapter Four. In the context of the graphic work in this chapter, I am primarily concerned with the shapes he developed and with the moods achieved. For example, the unification of the picture plane is aided by the etching process of hatched and swirling lines. The sensuality achieved is in part a response to the physical act of line-makingon metal. The mood of enclosed spaces, of being watched, of death and rebirth, have a rhythmic and cyclic parallel to the manner in which etched lines are built up. At times they resemble a cocoon. Boyd's images are private and, as a result, the observer can feel voyeuristic. Venus — observed, sleep, desire, the abandonment of death, all characterise Boyd's etchings in the early 1960s. We see, "woman portrayed as young, full of desire, yet defenceless; symbolised by being armless".[11] Male lust is personified in Boyd's work by the ram.

The primordial "imaginative" landscapes of the 1940s recur in the prints; the foliage of the trees becomes entwined with the figures and animals, giving the impression that the humans are totally enmeshed in the forces and power of nature; they are not in any way in charge of their life in the natural environment. "Line does not act as outline of form but as an enclosing, closing net of darkness."[12] A sense of

chaos is often conveyed by the equal status given to dogs, rams or lovers. *Nudes with Joined Feet* (1962-3) **(6.1)**, however, has a delicate and innocent quality, it is even gently amusing. These qualities are more often found in the prints as they are for Boyd more private than large paintings. The ram has lost his threatening persona and instead appears to be something more of a guardian angel or obedient pet (perhaps the result of Boyd's work with the wolf of Gubbio who was tamed by St. Francis of Assisi). The figures in many of these early prints have become extremely simplified and they possess a statuesque quality, possibly informed by Boyd's work in ceramic sculpture on Biblical themes, such as *Thirty Pieces of Silver* (1952-3) **(4.20)** and *The Kiss of Judas* (1952-3) **(4.19)**, which possess a simplicity and solidity in formal terms. A Boydian aesthetic has by this stage been firmly established. Boyd's interest in the simple but strong figures in medieval Italian painting (Sassetta and Giotto) is alluded to by these works. The floating figures are at times bird-like and insect-like but here Boyd creates not the pandemonium of human folly that he portrayed in his Brueghelesque paintings of the 1940s, but the pandemonium of the human psyche and the power of human sexuality. The blacker than black quality of the etching ink intensifies Boyd's swirling lines, creating a deep dreamlike sensation, an excursion into the psyche and a confrontation with both angels and unpleasant truths. Amid Boyd's dramas one finds very touching moments of calm in the etching and aquatint *Kneeling Nude with Beast II* (1962-63) **(6.2)**, the human figure and the beast are depicted in a tender embrace. The hatched and swirling lines in this case cocoon and protect them as if they represent something sacred — they precede Boyd's delicate treatment of the story in *The Lady and the Unicorn* **(7.37-7.42)**, where the female with whom the unicorn falls in love holds the creature with a divine respect, albeit a transient feeling on her part. Boyd's animals abound in the prints and he endows them with a curious mix of attributes, conveying the mystery and apparent contradictions that exist in Nature.

There are numerous examples in Boyd's etchings of the 1960s of the genesis of ideas for later works, whether they are precise shapes or the spatial organisation of the work: *Figure Washing* (1961) **(5.12)**, predates Boyd's Narcissus paintings and etchings of the 1980s (the definition of the figure and its relationship with the pool); *Lovers With a Bluebird* (1962) **(5.10)**, makes an interesting companion to the painting of the same title and date. The major figure in *Entombment* (1962-3) **(6.5)**, possesses a similar physical appearance (especially the hair and eye in profile) to the father of St. Francis (compare the lithograph, *St. Francis Being Beaten by his Father* (1965) **(7.7)**. The later etchings are more complex from the point of view of their narrative aspirations — for example, *Susannah with an Elder and a Dog* (1968-9) **(6.6)**, refers to the biblical story illustrated by Boyd twenty years earlier. *Serpenting Figure with Feathers and Insects* (1968-9) **(6.7)**,[13] possesses some of the fine arabesques that Boyd achieved in the St. Francis lithographs (for example, *The Wolf of Gubbio* **(7.12)**). In many prints of this period (as well as his *Nebuchadnezzar* paintings **(7.15-7.26)**) Boyd uses long graceful lines that seem to have no beginning or end. He uses them to create images of the unity and continuity of life and the relationship between humans and nature. Animals are concealed by branches and become part of them. Creatures grow out of tree trunks; insects, humans and beasts are joined. At times the artist's intention is enigmatic and it would appear that an element of chance and accident are allowable (even encouraged) by the artist in the intrinsic elements of the creative process. Humour plays a part, too: *Nebuchadnezzar on the Moon* (1968-9) **(6.8)** gazing pitifully towards planet Earth (on which only one landmark, Melbourne, is marked) has an air of absurdity, as does *Nebuchadnezzar with a Snail on his Back* (1968-9) **(6.9)**. *Ram and Dog with House and Trees* (1968-9) **(6.10)**, is completely childlike in execution and obviously drawn very quickly. The fluidity and lack of self-consciousness suggest that the artist gained very great pleasure from both the process

and the finished product.

Among the sixty-eight etchings produced by Boyd between 1968 and 1969 (all reproduced in the Maltzahn book) are five concerned with the life of Evelyn Gough, his maternal grandmother, her book *The Homing Bird of Bundaberg* and the exploits of the pioneer Australian aviator, Bert Hinkler, about whom she had written a poem. Boyd combined aspects of the Hinkler epic (e.g. the Bi-plane) and aspects of stories from the war told to him as a young boy, by his father. Hence the unlikely elements (united in free association by fluid lines) from poetry, his father's war memories, retold, and his own imagination. Boyd was attuned to the technical requirements of creating such fluid images and so adapted the "open-bite" method by inventing a new method for himself: he used a brush and a solution of one part kerosene and three parts oil to remove the wax ground on the plate before etching.[14] Hendrik Kolenberg described the effect of this method:

> This created a variation upon 'open-bite' with the brushed-in design deeply etched. The freedom method of line drawing is possible with a brush which is entirely suited to Boyd's fluid and impulsive draughtsmanship. The resulting etchings are unashamedly personal, including episodes from his father's life. In one, his father is portrayed nude, literally and symbolically joined at his penis to the fly-wheel of his potter's wheel. In another, he is shown fallen beside a 'squashed' pot, alongside the benign sculptured bust, on a plinth, of his wife Doris.[15]

Although the 1960s prints were only printed in editions of twenty-five (the same as *Narcissus* and *The Lady with the Unicorn*, for example), one senses that they were oriented primarily to personal expression and experimentation. They have a candour and privacy that suggest they are the subtler records of Boyd's impulses and feelings just as the drawings were in the 1940s. In both the early prints and the later suites of prints, which were also printed in editions by professional printers, he resolves formal

issues and plans future works. The production of prints for Arthur Boyd is like a laboratory for the distillation and experimentation of ideas that subsequently enable him to create large paintings on a dramatic scale and conception. I intend to illustrate the connection between graphic work and paintings in Part Three of this study. Boyd recognised the potential for the dramatic quality of line produced by drypoint when, in 1963, he was commissioned to design the backdrops and costumes for Robert Helpmann's ballet, *Elektra.*

Boyd's career is characterised by the independent path he pursued from a young age, made possible by an exceptionally supportive homelife. Throughout his career, he simultaneously balanced original and independent research and series of works with a need to work with others. From helping in his father's pottery at Murrumbeena as an adolescent, Boyd during the war years with friends John Perceval (later his brother-in-law) and Peter Herbst (who became a tutor in Philosophy at the University of Melbourne) established the Murrumbeena Pottery. Boyd continued to prefer to work in a type of communal life made up of family and friends at Murrumbeena. Financial necessity, of course, had a bearing on his choice too. At key stages in Boyd's life he chose to work with others. As early as 1947 he produced stage designs for *Love's Labours Lost*, produced by Peter O'Shaughnessy, a friend from the University of Melbourne. In 1956, also for O'Shaughnessy, he executed stage designs for *King Lear.*

In 1963 in London, following the great critical success of his work, Robert Helpmann (also Australian-born) commissioned Boyd to design the sets and costumes for his ballet at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London. The dramatic nature of the Greek tragedy filled with hatred, lust and despair prompted Boyd to create striking and intense images using enlarged etchings for the stage sets. His evocations of love and death were mostly well received, even though the ballet's reception was mixed. *The Spectator* critic, Clive Barnes, described it as an "insulting little ballet . . . To describe it as a disgrace is to make it sound more interesting than it deserves . . .

This must never happen again"![16] Boyd was described most perceptively as "Australia's Chagall"[17], his sets as arresting and "hysterical and immensely striking line-drawings, of anatomical nightmares, black upon white, all eyes and teeth and thighs and hair behind a blood-red floor-cloth upon which Elektra sits".[18] *The Bulletin* reported "Arthur Boyd's surrealist imagery is perfectly in keeping with the mood of the whole production and to a certain extent holds the whole thing together".[19] Boyd also designed the costumes. There were five etchings for the *Elektra* stage designs, three were used to change the centre stage backdrops and two formed the backdrops for the side wings. In *The Art of Arthur Boyd* four years later, Franz Philipp described the *Elektra* works:

> The designs are freer variations on 1962 paintings . . . The diagonal of energy of the *Nude with Beast* group of paintings determines the compositional rhythm of four of the *Elektra* prints: the oblique clash, pursuit and flight (*Wrestling Figures*) and the leaping encounter of tangent diagonals (*White Joined Figures*) often signifies, in Boyd's pictorial language, the violence of sexual encounter and battle; and battle in which the beast's gaping jaw, the shark's head, the convolutions of horns are worn like the strange masks of a primitive ritual enactment.[20]

By the end of the 1960s Boyd's printmaking had become more accomplished. The assistance of John Hull enabled him to experiment and to edition folios of prints in a fully professional manner. In what was an early example of a project based on a classical text as source material Boyd was commissioned by Ganymed Original Editions in 1970, to produce etchings to illustrate Aristophanes's comedy, *Lysistrata.* The translation was by Australian author and scholar, Jack Lindsay. Ganymed's Director, Bernhard Baer, introduced Boyd to Jack Lindsay. The Ganymed Press in London had printed graphic work for Oskar Kokoschka, Henry Moore and Sidney Nolan. The Victoria and Albert Museum, London held an exhibition (1980-81) in recognition of the importance of Ganymed's contribution to graphic art in Britain; in

the introduction to the catalogue Bernhard Baer describes the impact of the Australian artists who worked in London in the 1950s and 1960s with particular reference to Arthur Boyd:

> The Australian artists . . . burst on the London scene in the fifties. Their originality was partly due to the impact of their own environment and the isolation caused by the war during their formative years, but to a far greater extent to an abundance of talent. Out of the great numbers of painters who appeared . . . We were most impressed by Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan and Brett Whiteley . . . Arthur Boyd's works seemed to have an affinity with European Expressionism, which he had never directly encountered. His paintings showed his gift as a natural painter, but he also possessed a complete mastery over graphic processes . . . We were encouraged to suggest to him a suite of etchings based on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. After discussing a scenario and points like format, technique — aquatint and etching — he went to work on the subject which so obviously inspired him. Two months later he had a display of forty proofs on the wall of his studio — a staggering exhibition of dramatic invention and brilliant technique, completely original and at an antipodean distance from such famous predecessors as Beardsley and Picasso. [21]

With the publication in 1970 of the *Lysistrata* portfolio of etchings and aquatints, Boyd received a major commission the following year for the St. Helier Hospital, Carshalton in Surrey. The two large murals *Lysistrata I* and *Lysistrata* II **(6.16)** were funded by the Royal Academy. When the building was later demolished the murals were removed and acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. *Lysistrata II* (1971) illustrates the passage in Aristophane's play where the chorus refers to Pan, who to avoid marriage,"ran off to the hills and in a special grot raised a dog and spent his days hunting rabbits".[22] As with all of the art of Boyd where classical mythology or Biblical stories are used as primary sources of inspiration, he creates here not merely an illustration of the narrative but an original and powerful work. Boyd's use of allegory in painting and graphic media presents contemporary images — powerfully, tenderly, humorously. His constant invention and ceaseless

efforts in the techniques of printmaking, seen here, ensure that in the graphic works of Boyd are unlimited ideas, images and technical accomplishment.

ENDNOTES CHAPTER FIVE

1 Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd, op. cit.*, p. 111.

2 M. Plant, "Arthur Boyd's St. Francis Lithographs", *Imprint*, The Print Council of Australia, No. 2, 1968, no pagination.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Two early lithographs were shown in a group exhibition in a number of New Zealand galleries in the 1950s (no date available), No. 6 *Fantasy* and No. 7 *Allegory*, *Ibid.*, p. 148.

5 These belong to the Boyd Gift at the National Gallery of Australia.

6 Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, London, 1990.

7 Alan McCulloch, "The Drawings of Arthur Boyd", *Meanjin*, Vol. x, No. 2, Winter, 1951, pp. 155-156.

8 Laurie Thomas, "Foreword", *Arthur Boyd Drawings*, Secker and Warburg London, 1973, no pagination.

9 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

10 See Chapter SIX.

11 Imre von Maltzahn, *Arthur Boyd: Etchings and Lithographs*, Lund Humphries in association with the Maltzahn Gallery, London, 1971, no pagination.

12 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

13 I do not know whether Boyd or von Maltzahn used "serpenting" in the title. I do not think Boyd would have a non-word.

14 Hendrik Kolenberg, "Works on Paper", *Arthur Boyd Retrospective Catalogue* (ed.) Barry Pearce, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993, p. 162.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

16 Clive Barnes, "Vile Bodies",*The Spectator*, March 29, 1963.

17 Richard Buckle, "Helpmann in a Blaze",*The Sunday Times*, March 31, 1963.

18 *The Times*.

19 *The Bulletin*, April 13, 1963.

20 Franz Philipp, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

21 Bernhard Baer, "Introduction", Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1980, quoted by Hendrik Kolenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

22 Ursulf Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 63. In a letter from Barry Pearce September 1999, he suggests that it was more likely to be Pan than Melanion (as suggested by Hoff).

CHAPTER SIX

The Collaborative Projects of Arthur Boyd

A number of vital collaborative projects have provided varied stimulus for Arthur Boyd at key moments in his career. The two most influential were T.S.R. Boase and Peter Porter. Boase was an Oxford don and Fellow of All Souls College, who specialised in Medieval history. His papers at Magdalen College Library, Oxford do not contain reference to his projects with Boyd but in the Introduction to Franz Philipp's book he accords Boyd's painting the highest praise. Of Boyd's frescoes at Harkaway, Berwick, for his uncle Martin Boyd, Boase states: "Nowhere else in the Southern Hemisphere has the past, the frescoed room, the famous stories, so fertilized the present", and of his two paintings of the Expulsion, "it is a scene that has inspired great works, but not even Masaccio's immense despair has greater poignancy than this".[1] The two books, early published by Thames and Hudson, illustrate their complementary talents. Boase as an individual no doubt appealed to Boyd and he found his biography of St. Francis of Assisi and the story of Nebuchadnezzar very moving. He recognized the chance to acquaint himself on an intellectual and personally compatible level with scholarship that would in turn both enhance and enrich his art.

The Art of Arthur Boyd (1967) by Franz Philipp led in due course to the further commitment of the publishers to the two key works with which I will first deal. Here a rare and exceptional collaboration was engendered, between inspired publishers (Thames and Hudson), the artist, and chosen author; T.S.R. Boase. The creative importance of this initial sequence of collaborative graphic work, in the *œuvre* of Boyd cannot historically be over-estimated.

Peter Porter has written on the subject of "Working with Arthur Boyd". He begins by pointing out that the modern poet, painter, novelist, composer "is cocooned

in his ego and isolated from both the world of his fellow artists and that of his public by his inheritance of nineteenth-century individualism"[2]. As a poet, Porter collaborated on many musical projects with Don Banks, Christopher Whelen, Nicholas Maw, George Newson, Ronald Senator, Geoffrey Burgon and David Lumsdaine. He claimedthat there were as many failures as there were successes.

> Bending one's recalcitrant invention to someone else's need is not just frustrating, it is nearly impossible. Only when I first began to work with Arthur Boyd did I find that there is a fulfilling way of collaborating and that it requires each artist to go his own way, the resultant works being counterpointed rather than harmonised.[3]

Both artist and poet retained the "autonomy of imagination". A vital figure in the Porter/Boyd collaborations was English publisher and critic Tom Rosenthal who brought them together in the early 1970s, although they had met before. "Arthur Boyd and I both enjoy working to a theme, producing what amounts to a whole suite of poems and images which circle some myth or verbal icon." Their "Maecenas" had been London editor and critic, T.G. Rosenthal. "Rosenthal asked us to consider the Old Testament and find a subject for poems and pictures", Porter relates. Rosenthal had suggested the Book of Job but Porter was daunted by the fact that they would have to follow in the steps of William Blake. Rosenthal did not favour either aspects of the Gospels or The Acts of the Apostles.[4]

The St. Francis cycle of Arthur Boyd was produced in the early 1960s, five years after the artist had moved from Melbourne to London. In 1963, prior to his visit to Umbria, Boyd looked at the Sassetta paintings in the National Gallery, London. The Boyds made an Italian visit in the summer of 1964: of particular interest in this context were the towns of Gubbio and Assisi. In the autumn of the same year Boyd produced pastel images of the *Wolf of Gubbio*.

In London, Boyd received a visit from the Oxford academic T.S.R. Boase, author of a biography of St. Francis in 1937. The biography only reached page proof

stage before the publishing warehouse in which it was temporarily housed was bombed. Only a few advance copies survived.

Arthur Boyd had first met Boase in Melbourne in 1956. Joseph Burke, then Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne introduced Boase to Bernard Smith who in turn took Boase to visit Arthur Boyd in his studio and home in a neighbouring suburb. Bernard Smith recalls:

> Arthur's work immediately appealed to Boase. Later Boase was also greatly taken by the Antipodean Manifesto and wrote approvingly of it in the first draft of the preface he was asked to write for the Franz Philipp book on Boyd. But Franz, who could be a rather heavy-handed editor, asked him to soften his enthusiasm. Philipp, at first enthusiastic about the Antipodean exhibition of August 1959, cooled considerably later, at least so far as the Manifesto was concerned, probably as a result of the widespread hostility the Manifesto aroused at the time.[5]

Boase visited Harkaway, the house of Arthur Boyd's uncle Martin near Melbourne, where Boyd had painted frescoes in 1948-9. In the preface to Franz Philipp's book published in 1965 Boase wrote in the highest praise of Boyd's work.[6]

In London Boase visited Arthur Boyd's studio in Hampstead Lane from time to time. A collaborative project was the natural outcome of their shared enthusiasm for Italian art and the life of St. Francis. Boase regarded Boyd's work very highly "not even Masaccio's immense despair has greater poignancy than this".[7] Boyd found Boase's account of the life of St. Francis "very moving".[8] In preparation for the project Boyd also read, in English translation,[9] *The Fioretti di San Francesco*, originally written in the fourteenth century. The Giotto paintings in Assisi (although not generally accepted - now - as being by Giotto) and the Sassetta paintings in London both contributed to Boyd's enthusiasm for St. Francis as a subject; their clarity and simplicity seemed in keeping with the life of St. Francis.

In 1966 a plan was made for Boase's work to be published by Thames and Hudson. Tom Rosenthal, the editor there had met Boyd in 1960 and felt that the scholarly text by Boase and Boyd's images were an excellent combination. As the pastels were too expensive to reproduce, Boyd undertook a series of twenty-one new lithographs based on the design of the pastels.

Following publication of Boase's book Boyd met a former acquaintance in London, Frank MacDonald who was visiting from Sydney.[10] He was on his way to Portugal where he planned to meet up with the artist John Olsen.[11] Their plan was to visit the Portalegre Tapestries and to commission them to make tapestries from a number of Olsen's paintings. Boyd decided to join MacDonald and Olsen, interested both by Portugal as a country and by the medium of tapestry. Portalegre was a traditional tapestry workshop organised by a headwoman but the work was carried out by girls aged between 12 and 18 years. Boyd at first had little idea of the subtlety that could be achieved in tapestry. He did several small simple designs, before realising that the process was capable of infinite subtlety. Pastel lent itself to the transfer process. Although, as the artist recalls, Portugal was in the 1960s a very poor country, with low wages, the making of tapestries was labour intensive and skilled.[12] In spite of the considerable cost Boyd commissioned the Portalegre tapestry works to make twenty-one large tapestries of the pastel images: these took three years to weave and were paid for from the sale of his own paintings in London and Australia. The tapestries were subsequently bought by the Australian National Gallery which helped to pay the Portalegre but "barely broke even".[13] Regrettably the tapestries have not been publicly exhibited as they hang in Australia House, the residence of Australia's Governor General.

Boyd worked in a variety of media; the 1960s in particular were characterised by work in new media. It was perhaps the suggestive and exploratory nature of pastel that appealed to the artist, surrounded as he was by a plethora of new places and images. Pastel is inherently an intimate and delicate medium, having in directness of

expression the qualities of drawing yet possessing too, the painterly qualities of pure colour and layered strokes. For Boyd a special appeal lay in the purity of the pigment of pastel. Since the early 1940s Boyd had ground his own pigments just as he made his own paints.[14] Such was the immediate context for Boyd in the 1960s.

Medieval and Renaissance Italian painting appealed to Boyd's love of the Bible and of landscape. Both the art of the Old Masters as well as the actual story of St. Francis of Assisi made a strong impact on Arthur Boyd. He remained indifferent both towards the trend towards abstraction in painting and to the blandishments of the international style then in ascendancy. In Arthur Boyd's St. Francis cycle it is the depth, quality and original interpretation of a given narrative that merit further examination.

St. Francis of Assisi, as a timeless figure, appeals to many authors, biographers and artists. He epitomises the rejection of material comfort for the sake of spiritual redemption. He perceived how humans obsessed with self-aggrandisement become indifferent to the claims of others. Arthur Boyd, in the 1940s, produced numerous paintings on the subject of Mammon. *The Golden Calf* (1946) **(4.6)** illustrates the story of when Moses, receiving the Ten Commandments, returned to find a widespread outbreak of idol-building. Another work, *Moses Throwing Down the Tables of the Law* (1946) **(4.7)** expresses the profound anger of the artist as represented in the figure of Moses and conveys his commitment to the simple spiritual values in life, supporting humanist principles.

In *The Mining Town* (1946-7) **(4.9)** the rural Australian church next to the mine signifies the temple in the Bible story. Everyday activities predominate while the Expulsion takes place. Boyd's eye for the *minutiae* of life, for human folly in its many guises, his rejection of materialism and greed, inculcated in the artist from a tender age, uniquely prepared him for the study of St. Francis.

Francis's innate love of all creatures became transmuted into a tender

> and intimate fellowship with them. Like himself, they all derived their life from God, and so there was a real kinship between men and everything that has life.[15]

During his childhood, Boyd recalledthat if a spider was in the house his father would go to extraordinary lengths to remove it alive.[16] No creature was killed for, in his scheme of things like that of St. Francis, all forms of life, no matter how humble, were to be preserved and respected. The love of St. Francis was not limited to the beautiful; indeed he had a special regard for the poor and unlearned (making his inevitable link between them and Christ) and he extended his love to various pests and to lepers.

Arthur Boyd drew prolifically during the war years, depicting especially the outcasts and eccentrics who dominated the beach in the working class area of Albert Park. This became Boyd's stage: there is a macabre humour in some of his characters as depicted; expressions of tenderness mingle with outrage at the war and the feelingof individual impotence. The cripple is a central figure of Boyd's imagery, (developed from his own observations of friends and also from Breughel's example, *Cripples*) conveying the injustice of individual suffering. Possibly in a similar vein, the role of the leper in the story of St. Francis may come to symbolise the same plight.

Central too, to Boyd's imagery in the 1940s is a red dog. A paralysed dog had been taken for daily walks on Albert Park Beach by its owner Boyd remembered, and he used the strange image in many drawings. The connection between humans and beasts (the bestiality of war, the mindless atrocities of humans which make them more animal than human) is essentially different to that of St. Francis but it does nonetheless make the allusion concerning the unity of all creatures. Boyd's red dog appeared on many occasions; *Figure with Dog and Falling Money* (early 1940s): *Kafka's Metamorphosis* (c. Late 1940s): *Ordeal by Fire* (c.1961-2); and in a painting which was seminal for the particular St. Francis painting of 1963/4, the *Cripple, and Crying Dog in Industrial Landscape* (1962/3).

Arthur Boyd's St. Francis works fall into two categories. Firstly there are works prompted by his identification with the character and story of St. Francis of Assisi. Secondly there are works produced in collaboration with Boase to illustrate Boase's biography of the Saint's life. The *Wolf of Gubbio* pastels were produced after the summer visit to Italy. They were a personal response to the subject. When Boyd and Boase collaborated on the book Boyd produced sixteen pastels. When they proved too expensive to reproduce, he embarked on a series of 16 lithographs illustrating the same episodes as the pastels. A single oil painting *St. Francis* produced in 1963-4. As with the *Wolf of Gubbio* pastels, it was unrelated to the book project with Boase.

The point in making this distinction is to establish the artist's primary sources. Although Boyd read the *Fioretti*, it was primarily to acquaint himself with the saint's life and to gain insight into his character.[17] Further, he claims to have enjoyed the fourteenth century account of St. Francis's life in the same way he enjoyed Bible stories as a child.[18] Indeed the life of St. Francis had greater appeal for, unlike the Bible, it did not contain episodes laced with cruelty and violence in the manner of the Old Testament, even though Boyd does depict violence and suffering in his early post-war work.[19] When he came to producing a *series* of works illustrating the saint's life, it was Boase's history that he used as his main source. It was the artist's intention to "illustrate the life of St. Francis through Boase's biography not through history".[20] Boyd greatly admired other artists' handling of the story, especially Giotto and Sassetta. But he was determined to produce an original and personal account of the story. The reason he gives for not including the famous episode in the saint's life: *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds* is that, in his own mind, he could only see the image as the Giotto painting. He felt unable to make that image his own.[21] The same was true of other "major" events in St. Francis's life that are not included in Boyd's account. Boyd chose aspects of the saint's life that had not previously been illustrated, but that conveyed the saint's innocence and

quintessentially human qualities. In the works he emphasises the relationship of St. Francis to his followers.[22] In both pastel and lithography Boyd found sympathetic media with which to create images of light and of a life-enhancing spirit. I hope to expand this investigation to explore the validity of notions of originality and authenticity in Boyd's painting, central I believe to the task of placing his work in the broader context of late twentieth-century art.

Boyd's series of lithographs, in illustrating Boase's text, follows the chronology of St. Francis's life. The first plate, *St. Francis and the Revels of Assisi* **(7.5)** shows St. Francis turning away from the worldly activities of his companions, in the first of a series of his moves towards full conversion to the Faith. Boase cites the *Legend of The Three Companions* (1246).[23]

> As a young man leading the revels in Assisi, he was on a sudden visited by the Lord, and his heart was filled with such sweetness that he could not speak . . . And his companions asked him "what are you thinking of; why do you not come with us. Perhaps you are thinking of taking a wife." To whom he replied "You speak true, a bride nobler and richer and fairer than you have ever seen." And they derided him. But thus he said not of himself but of God, for his bride was true religion[24]

Boyd emphasises St. Francis's rejection of the revelry of the lovers by the strong and gracefullines that divide the plane symbolically between the physical pleasure on one side with the contemplative and spiritual on the other.

Plate II, *Dreaming of a Hunchback*, **(7.4)** refers to St. Francis' subconscious fear that the demon would punish him for his good works.

> Now there was a certain woman in Assisi, deformed with a hunched back whom the demon kept bringing to the mind of the man of God, threatening him that the hunchback of this woman would fall on him unless he forsook the work he had undertaken.[25]

Boyd uses the formal device of the spiralling hair in this instance (and in the several subsequent works) to conjure the dream, joining the subject of the dream,

floating above St. Francis. The spiral strongly resembles an umbilical cord or perhaps a lassoo - suggesting the deep-seated power of subconscious fears and dreams. In the pastel of the same episode, Boyd covers the surface with short parallel marks, predominantly red and yellow. Black strokes are applied in the same manner towards the edges of the picture plane to establish a dark, and dreamlike atmosphere.

Plate III, *Kissing the Hand of the Leper*,**(7.6)** is a fine example of the lightness of touch Boyd achieves with lithography, a medium which like pastel is well-suited to ephemeral, evocative imagery. Boase cites *The Legend of The Three Companions*:

> When he was riding near Assisi, he met a leper on his path. And since he had been wont to have much horror of lepers, doing violence on himself, he dismounted, and offered him alms, kissing his hand. And having received the kiss of peace from him, he remounted and proceeded on his way. And so he began more and more to humble himself until by the grace of God he reached fully victory over himself.[26]

The definition of the hand clasping that of the leper emphasises the humility in the crouching figure of St. Francis - yet also imparts the God-given grace in St. Francis confronted by the leper - conceivably the most physically debased form of humanity.

Plate IV, *St. Francis Beaten by his Father* **(7.7)** is the violent climax to the story in which, while St. Francis was praying in the ruined church of S Damiano, Christ on the Crucifix spoke, asking that he repair this His house. So Francis sold various possessions, including his horse, on his return to Assisi taking the money to the priest. When Francis' father learnt of this he became enraged and locked him in a darkened room for several days, hoping that St. Francis would so see his folly and behave as his father wished. The whole picture field here is predominantly black. The anguish expressed by St. Francis on his rejection by the father is dramatically emphasised by repeatedly diagonal markings relieved only by the white outlines of the two distraught figures. The father figure here is a 'cruel god' image of the Old Testament (the fierce patriarch e.g. Noah). Boyd sets him against the redeeming, kind

figure of St. Francis who is closer in character to Christ. Boyd's draughtsmanship is founded on the strength of classical drawing where the act of control is compared to the act of surrender. For this episode Boase uses as his source the first *Life of St. Francis* written, probably between 1229 and 1231, by Thomas of Celano, who had joined the order in 1215.[27] The arched structure in the background of the image is the window sill on which the priest placed the bag of coins, "the priest, for fear of Francis's parents, refused the money, so the true despiser of monies cast the bag on the window sill, heeding it as little as dust".[28]

Plate V, *St. Francis and Rufino Preached Naked in Assisi.***(7.8)** The *Fioretti* describes this episode in Assisi, of St. Francis and Rufino "stripped to their undergarments".[29] As Boase points out:

> . . . to Arthur Boyd the theme of nakedness is more stressed and complete, and Brother Rufino instead of mounting the pulpit steps cowers unhappily, while Francis, unashamed, is transfigured in ecstasy.[30]

Boyd here uses the black and white medium in a highly versatile manner by employing his own method to apply white to the already dark plate. With this highly original technique Boyd used a two inch long square conté crayon which he held at each end with his finer tips and lowered onto the zinc plate (which had already been hatched with a lithographic crayon). The material of the two crayons being the same (although generally a rounded lithographic crayon is used for drawing) allows the crayon on the plate to adhere to the hand-held crayon and it can then be lifted off leaving clean marks on the plate.[31] The effect created is one of "throwing light into the world", and has a Futuristic quality.

Plate VI, *St. Francis Makes Brother Masseo Turn Round and Round* **(7.14)** finds St. Francis and Brother Masseo together at the junction of three roads. Brother Masseo asks Francis which one they should take. St. Francis responds, "By that which God wills". When Masseo asks how they would know the will of god, Francis

replies:

> By the sign that I shall show you: when I command you by the merit of holy obedience that at this cross-road on the spot where your feet are placed, you spin yourself round and round, as children do, and do not stop from turning yourself till I tell you to.[32]

When Masseo stopped spinning he was facing the road to Siena. That was the route they followed. This is one of Boyd's most interesting images of both lithograph and pastel. St. Francis is here portrayed as a dark eminence benevolently manipulating the spiralling Masseo. Boyd conveys the dynamic movement of the revolving Masseo by means of a multiple image representing Masseo's head, likewise his toes. This complex episode is conveyed by a remarkable economy of means - a large area of lithographic plate is unmarked. The two sets of multiple images used by Boyd recall *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* (Balla, 1912) and *Nude Descending a Staircase* (Duchamp, 1912) of which Boyd was aware. This image would have needed more planning than those where the image goes to the edge of the plate.

Plate VII is entitled *St. Francis Holding Clare's Hair.***(7.9)** It depicts an episode involving St. Clare that is one of the most touching and poetic in the story of St. Francis. Their relationship, the epitome of spiritual union, is treated tenderly by Arthur Boyd, and is central to his cycle in this respect. Once again, Boyd's choice of medium (with seductive aquatinting) proves well-suited to the images of sublime love which he seeks to convey. Abandoning all adornment and divorcing herself from the world, Clare left her family and entered the Franciscan Order. Boase tells the story of Clare:

> It was in the Holy Week of 1212 that this daughter of a noble Assisian house, a girl of some eighteen years, came down to the Porziuncola, where Francis cut off her long hair in sign of admission to his Order, and then took her to the neighbouring Monastery of San Paolo. For

> both of them is was a step of great daring: he, on his side, had no authority to admit women, nor to administer vows to them - it might well bring against the brothers all the indignation of Assisi, for Clare's family had much influence; she, on her side, had to face the wrathful remonstrance of her kin, knowing that Francis had no refuge to give her.[33]

From the *Legend of St. Clare*:

> And so going forth, leaving the house the city and her kindred, she went eagerly to S Maria di Porziuncula, where the brothers, keeping vigil in the church, welcomed the holy maid by torchlight. And laying aside all worldly vanity of Babylon, she gave there forthwith a bill of divorcement from the world, and leaving the tresses of her shorn hair in the hands of the friars completely abandoned all adornment.[34]

Instead of "The friars" in the above source cited by Boase, Boyd uses the figure of St. Francis in the image with St. Clare to emphasize their spiritual affinity. According to Boase,[35] the scenes with St. Clare stirred Boyd deeply. Indeed throughout the collaborative project Boase encouraged Boyd's personal interpretation. "The Life of St. Francis is not a subject for exact measurement and explanation: every man will find his own interpretation of it, seeing by its light some reproach of his own ways."[36] In the *Legend of The Three Companions* there is evidence of St. Francis's attitude to women which is central to his relationship with Clare and Jacopa of Settesoli (see Plate XI).

> He specially loved the fairness and cleanness of decency, and wished the friars to have modest eyes; teaching them that when they looked on a woman they looked on the spouse of Christ.[37]

Many of St. Francis's followers were women "of whom Francis, with his almost feminine sensitiveness, had a keen understanding; who, in return, often seemed best able to understand him".[38] The touching story of Clare's devotion to Francis, and

to the life of total sacrifice is delicately conveyed by Boyd who achieves in pastel and lithography a wide range of feelings and subtle nuance, from the erotic to the holy.

Plate VIII, *St. Francis and the Harlot* is an image of innocence, triumphant over evil. The foetal response of the two conjoined has a dreamlike, spiritual quality which conveys the essence of St. Francis' teaching in this instance, when he was tempted by a whore, yet converted her to the message of Christ by himself lying down on a burning hearth.[39] Boyd here uses closely hatched marks that push against a clearly defined edge of the plate, to suggest total immersion. The difficulty of conveying intense heat graphically in black and white is surmounted by the total envelopment of the two figures together, yet also conveying an acute tension between them and the edge of the plane. Some flames are outlined around the harlot's figure but the protective arm of St. Francis relieves concern. St. Francis' hair is here shown completely flat (as if soaking wet) again shielding the amazed woman (in contrast to previous spiralling effects). Small circles on his forehead represent beads of water. The actual body of the harlot seems convoluted in the composition in direct contrast to the seeming repose of the saint himself.

Plate IX illustrates the story of *St. Clare Showing her Shorn Head* **(7.10)** cited by Boase from *The Legend of St. Clare.* In spite of the anger and condemnation expressed by family at Clare's situation, Boyd produces a moving and sad image, concentrating on the plight of the grieving father at the loss of his daughter.

> Now when the report of these doings reached the ears of her kinsfolk, they passionately and bitterly condemned the maid's decision, and, in an angry body, hastened to the place where she was . . . urging her with threats of violence or with the poison of good advice . . . to leave so low and vile a life, unsuited to one of noble stock . . . But she, steadfastly resisting, laid hold of the altar cloths, and bared her shorn head, saying that nothing would now separate her from the service of Christ.[40]

Boyd shows Clare's father in sad acceptance of the impending loss of his beloved

daughter yet with particular understanding of her exchange of the nobility of their *milieu* for abject poverty, in spite of his anger and disgust. The anguish of St. Clare and her sisters is conveyed starkly by three tears. Once again, the hatched lines are applied directionally to form a variable background tone, yet with an almost luminous intensity.

Plate X, *St. Francis and St. Clare Eat Together*, is based on the answering of her request to eat a meal with St. Francis:

> Clare came and while she and Francis spoke together, the whole friary and the wood round about seemed ablaze with light, so that all the townspeople ran down to extinguish the fire, only to find that this was no earthly light[41]

In this image "St Francis has a double profile, one gazing at the luminous face of St. Clare, one looking down at the head of one of the citizens".[42] The structure of the images within the darkened field here is still precise enough to convey the meal as the real context for the mysterious double-image which nonetheless predominates.

Plate XI, the *Gift of the Lamb* **(7.11)** is a marvellous and touching image. As in the tale of the *Wolf of Gubbio*, Arthur Boyd now emphasises the unity of man and beast in creation. St. Francis gave a lamb to a noblewoman, Jacopa of Settesoli. Jacopa, in deference to St. Francis' wish, cared for this lamb in her house and it accompanied her in many activities, including to church. The lamb signifies gentleness and devotion and also a sacrificial animal. Here the unity of the three figures is emphasised by the directional striation (as in Plate V) of the white marks in contrast on the plate to the heavy graphic lines.

Plate XII is concerned with the *Wolf of Gubbio*.**(7.12)** This story is that which first captured Arthur Boyd's imagination in the story of St. Francis. Boyd first encountered it when viewing the Sassetta paintings in the National Gallery in London. In the opinion of George Katal, the legend of the Wolf of Gubbio is "the most marvellous story of the *Fioretti*".[43] The Wolf of Gubbio had terrorised the people of

Gubbio and its surrounds to the point where they felt unable to leave the town for fear of being attacked and devoured. St. Francis had great compassion for the people of Gubbio, and set out for the town:

> And lo! The said wolf in the sight of much folk that had come to behold the miracle, leapt towards St. Francis with gaping jaws; and St. Francis made to him the sign of the most holy cross and called him, speaking thus, "Come hither, friar wolf; I command thee in the name of Christ that thou do not hurt neither to me or to any man." No sooner had St. Francis made the sign of the holy cross than the terrible wolf closed his jaws and stayed his course; no sooner was the command uttered than he came, gentle as a lamb, and laid himself at the feet of St. Francis.[44]

St. Francis stated the wolf's sins and made peace with it and an agreement that it never attack again.

> And when St. Francis held forth his hand to receive this pledge, the wolf lifted up his right paw and gently laid it in the hand of St. Francis, giving him thereby such token of good faith as he could . . . and the wolf, obedient, set forth by his side even as a pet lamb; wherefore, when the men of the city beheld this, they marvelled greatly.[45]

An agreement was made between the wolf and the townsfolk that they feed him for the rest of his life. When, two years later, the wolf died the townsfolk grieved for he had become not only a communal household pet but he represented the virtues and holiness of St. Francis himself. Sassetta portrayed the wolf offering a repentant hand to St. Francis; in the background lies a dismembered human figure. Boyd made numerous versions of the legend. A pastel of 1964-5 *St. Francis Kissing the Wolf of Gubbio* **(see also 7.1)** shows the reconciliation with a butterfly perched on his head, whilst he also kissed the leper. The lithograph which now comprises Plate XII is quite different. The figure of St. Francis grows out of a tree in a crouched position. The wolf is underneath St. Francis. The two are merged together so conveying the harmony St. Francis was able to achieve between humans and animals. The "woolly bush" has a

human soul trapped inside. The Wolf of Gubbio was a creature of fear and darkness which St. Francis embraces. The figure growing out of the branch has its origins in a series of ceramicpaintings done in 1962-4, where he used a particular gum tree branch that had a large end that could in the context of fantasy be construed as a face. The ceramicpainting *Two Ended Figure with Bouquet* (1962-3) **(5.16)** is a good example of this device of Boyd's.

Plate XIII, *The Ordeal by Fire*, was also depicted by Giotto, as Francis before the Soldan. St. Francis was preaching before the Soldan when he "offered to prove which was the surest faith, the Law of Mahomet or that of Christ by entering a great fire along with the Soldan's priests".[46] According to Boase, the story is not very probable, but (he says) the painters were drawn to it and cites the Giotto in Santa Croce.[47] Arthur Boyd creates a very much more violent image: an armed figure grabs St. Francis in order to push him into the fire. St. Francis is seen to epitomise faith and innocence, with human threats to one side of him, impending death on the other.

Plate XIV, *St. Francis Cleansing the Leper* **(7.3)** enabled Boyd to depict the strength and determination of St. Francis. No-one it seemed could communicate effectively with this leper, who was stricken not only with the appalling disease but also carried great anger and distress over his plight. The *Fioretti* gives this account:

> In a lazar house tended by the friars there was one leper who abused everyone who served him, and blasphemed God saying "what peace can I have from God, who has made me all rotten and stinking?" St. Francis came to him and asked what he could do for him, and the leper said "Wash me all over for I stink so strongly that I cannot endure Myself." "Then St. Francis forthwith had water heated with many sweet smelling herbs, and then stripped the leper, and began to wash him with his own hands, and another brother poured out the water. And by a divine miracle, at the touch of St. Francis's holy hands, the leprosy departed and the flesh remained perfectly sound.[48]

As in Plate VI, *St. Francis Makes Brother Masseo Turn Round and Round*, **(7.14)** Boyd uses multiple images to convey movement. Boyd's pastel image of *St.*

Francis Cleansing the Leper (1964-5) **(7.3)** is a fine example of the suitability of the medium. Boyd covers the surface with short parallel marks, predominantly red and yellow. Black strokes are applied in the same manner towards the edge of the picture plane to establish a dark, dreamlike atmosphere. This image is predominantly black with the two ethereal figures in yellow and white rising from the plane. Boyd's pastel images are delicate and luminous. The St. Francis pastel images, in formal terms, spring from the paintings Boyd did in the early 1960s on the theme of Lovers - for example, *Lovers With a Bluebird* (1962) **(5.10)** and *Nude With Beast III (Diana and Actaeon)* (1962) **(5.9)** and the related series of etchings. The floating forms of Diana and Actaeon prepare the way for the juxtaposition of figures in the pastels, *Dreaming of a Hunchback* (1964-5) **(7.1)** and *St. Francis With the Stigmata Appearing to the Pope* (1964-5). Both involve a radical organisation of the picture plane; a poetic sensibility is here paramount. The St. Francis cycle with the "softer blurred and constantly transformational imagery"[49] is in vast contrast to previous cycles, for example, the *Bride* series with its "hard, clear images".[50] When he was in London in 1962 Bernard Smith gave a talk over The Third Programme of the BBC on the work of Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd. In it he developed the notion of "iconomorphic" form in which he "drew attention to the ways in which both artists tended to use a stock of images which they constantly presented in new ways conflating and transforming them to suit their expressive purpose"[51] Boyd recorded Smith's talk on tape and played it over a number of times "to get the gist" of what Smith had to say. It is reasonable to claim that the idea of "iconomorphic" form may have been one of several factors leading to Boyd's experimentation in formal terms and so on to a considerable change in style between say The Bride and the St. Francis cycle.[52]

When St. Francis knew he was dying, he remembered Jacopa of Settesoli (to whom he gave the lamb in Plate XI). She had in the past made for him a sweetmeat of almond and sugar. He was just issuing a request that she be contacted when she arrived at the door, "bringing a shroud, wax for tapers and a dish of (Mostaccioli)".

Boase quotes the *Mirror of Perfection* for this episode.[53] Plate XV, *Jacopa of Settesoli and the Dish of Mostaccioli*, **(7.13)** has a significance in terms of the relationship of St. Francis and Jacopa, which Boyd emphasises by hatching in the figure of the saint with heavily applied lines contrasted with a delicate treatment of the facial features (so matching Jacopa's own): the saint's love for Jacopa is reflective of one who knew intuitively both his last wish and of his imminent death.

Place XVI, *Jacopa Tends St. Francis*, is the finale of the series. In the context of the saint's imminent death, Boyd's instinctive affinity with St. Francis endorses this typical departure from religious protocol in the face of sublime love and devotion. So Boyd here emphasises the close human bond of the two figures, in no way remote, nor formalised. The characteristic (now) triple spiral of Franciscan hair is adroitly drawn in a final flourish above the serenely recumbent figures. Ultimately it is Boyd's humanism which prevails. According to all religious precedent the last rites were performed without the presence of women. But Francis, for whom women played a central part in his order said:

> This rule is not for this lady whom such faith and devotion has brought here from distant parts.[54]

Arthur Boyd's preoccupation with the legend of St. Francis as expressed in the media of pastel and lithography had not, before 1963 been extended into painting. But such was Boyd's identification with the human characterisation of this Saint that in 1963-4 he produced a single painting of St. Francis. *St. Francis* (1963-4, oil on canvas 108.5cm x 113cm) is a large work, almost square in dimension, and iconic in significance. In the prussian blue area surrounding the central figures, the brushstrokes have been applied in a similar manner to the pastel strokes of the St. Francis pastel works. The drawn effect is carried through to the two figures, the observer on the right and St. Francis in the centre. The Wolf of Gubbio who was in formal terms Boyd's red dog of numerous earlier works exemplifies contrition. Indeed Boyd manages in this

imageto display with tremendous power and insight the feelingof an animal,the unity between man and beast. The figure of St. Francis is a most exciting creation, semi-abstract in the impastoed swirls of paint in the face, so enhancing the aura of the saint. The internal framing of the figures is created by the edges of a high backed chair. In the use of very pure (handmade) paint, St. Francis in this painting is very moving; Boyd captures the essence of his *persona* - the innocence, the power, the miracle of his life.

Arthur Boyd's St. Francis cycle departs radically from previous artists' treatment of the theme. The medievalartists told the story of St. Francis by depicting significant events such as: *Vision of the Heavenly Palace* (Sassetta 1437-44), *Preaching to Birds* (Bonaventura Berlinghieri, 1235), *Apparition to Gregory IX* (Roman School early Fourteenth Century), *Exorcisms at the Tomb* (Berlinghieri, 1235). These works were all commissioned and the subjects chosen for particular reasons. By contrast Boyd's interpretation is far freer. None of the above-mentioned events are included in Boyd's cycle. Boyd sought to produce images that were a personal response to the life of St. Francis. In the lithographs for Boase's book, Boase encouragedthe artist to make a statement that had validity within his own *œuvre* and his own personal world view. In this respect his work is akin to the work of William Blake.[55] Boase was impressed by the works Boyd produced. In the 'Introduction' to Franz Philipp's book *Arthur Boyd* (Thames and Hudson, London, 1967) he describes Boyd's St. Francis cycle in this way:

> The painters of Assisi, whether or not Giotto was amongst them, Sassetta or Benozzo Gozzoli, would be hard put to it to identify these glowing, inexplicit scenes, constantly lit by flames, the symbolic fire of St. Francis's devotion. He then repeated them with considerable variations in the black and white of lithograph, achieving a remarkable luminosity in his use of the white background. Here past inventions, the flying, half faceless figures, the distorted forms, the mingling of reality and fantasy, are fused into a deeply felt unity, continuing from plate to plate, forming a remarkable interpretative *tour de force.*

> Nothing hitherto in Boyd's work has quite matched this prolonged intensity.[56]

Arthur Boyd produced these works in the 1960s when the prevailing trend was towards abstraction. This is not to say that Boyd ignored formal considerations: indeed the lithographs and pastels display the keen interest Boyd had to experiment with his medium and to manipulate the picture plane to convey a variety of complex and technically demandingmoods or ideas.

The 1960s served as a vital period offering a full depth of reflection for the artist. The *persona* of St. Francis had provided Boyd with a great challenge. The subtle nuances and spiritual demands that the cycle imposed on the artist together with new technical achievements extended his repertoire. In this period, as in the 1940s (when Boyd drew prolifically), Boyd can be seen to have advanced significantly to a new maturity. From this stage forward over three decades into his seventies (the 1990s) there now emerged a sustained flow of vast, visionary, even brilliant canvases.

The publication by Thames and Hudson of Nebuchadnezzar in 1972 with a text by T.S.R. Boase was accompanied by substantial illustration by Arthur Boyd, revealingsome eighteen drawings and thirty-four paintings as executed between 1968 and 1971. The endpapers subtly displayed the detail of a drypoint. The drawings were either executed in pen or in pen and wash. Boase contributed a concise and elegant historical text amounting to a resumé of the life and times of Nebuchadnezzar. The Biblicaltext itself is some 8,000 words in length. Appropriate captions by Boase accompany the thirty-four paintings; these comprise both Biblical quotes and interpretative comments by Boase of Boyd's paintings.

The Nebuchadnezzar paintings were done in London. Many more were painted than those published in the book, for example fifty-eight were exhibited at the Adelaide Festival in Australia in 1968 followed by the Bonython gallery in Sydney. In October/November of the same year further Nebuchadnezzar paintings were exhibited

at the Tooth's gallery in London. In Scotland, in the summer of 1969 eighteen Nebuchadnezzar paintings were shown as part of a Retrospective Exhibition at the Richard Demarco Gallery during the Edinburgh Festival.

T.S.R. Boase becomes the first to admit that although Boyd makes reference to the narrative, the actual myth is newly and freshly created by him:

> . . . the gold over which the crazed king fumbles recalls the plate of the Temple that he pillaged and the golden image that he had made; the springing lion, half friend, half foe, with which he almost merges, may have come from Daniel's den.[57]

Boyd's supreme response indicates how deeply affected he was by the character of Nebuchadnezzar and in pictorial terms the allegoricalpotential for aspects of his life. It was Boyd's own ability to exploit as stimulus Boase's scholarly presentation of Nebuchadnezzar that in retrospect now becomes extraordinary in the twentieth-century context of creativity. In a comparatively short space of time Boyd had produced dozens of large dramatic canvases. They exceed the normal remit of illustration, infused with aspects of his previous paintings, and elements of autobiography against the backdrop of a primordial Australian landscape.

Rather than relating the story of Nebuchadnezzar as a series of spectacular events and achievements, which would have been tempting to any writer, the distinguished British historian T.S.R. Boase chose to present the reader with clearly arranged and annotated literary sources, thus allowing private interpretation. The highly original, surprising, indeed brilliant, paintings and drawings that accompany this text could never serve as mere illustrations; they are Arthur Boyd's personal response to the mythology surrounding the historical Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and his Jewish official, Daniel. Boyd allows his imagination to explore a range of possible situations and sensations that Nebuchadnezzar might have experienced,especially during his period of insanity - either in an actual wilderness or in one within his own mind. These are powerfully evocative scenes. Boase in his own

turn has supplied more than simple captions for the paintings: in some cases he offers the relevant biblical text; in most an indication of the focus of meaning that can be elucidated through consideration of Boyd's forceful use of imagery, colour, symbolism, form and movement and their resulting emotional impact on the viewer.

It might surprise some readers that in a book published as late as 1972, in a period when linguists and biblical scholars were busily preparing new translations of the Bible based on recently discovered and studied ancient manuscripts - in language more appropriate to the late twentieth century, Boase should have chosen to quote mainly the Authorised Version of the Bible, published by order of King James I of Englandin 1611. The literary merits of the Authorised Version are indisputable but it has become progressively less accessible to the general reader as a result of inevitable changes in style and word connotation with the passing of time. John Knox's translation from the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, which Boase quotes in notes beside paintings two and seven, is likewise given in Shakespearean English, having been written several decades before the Authorised Version. Boase obviously planned this use to achieve a fine resonance in the archaic languageand this helps to convey considerable weight and an appropriate sense of authenticity to these myths from antiquity. Traditional conventions of story-telling, such as repetition and hyperbole (how hot the fiery furnace and how ravenous the lions!) add to one's sense of expectation and final satisfaction.

The layout in this collaborative work by Boase and Boyd is unusual. The writing only occupies forty-two pages, many of them with Boyd's paintings facing. Then follow forty-two leaves, containing paintings and drawings by Boyd with brief annotations by Boase. Only at a few stages in the narrative, for example, on page thirty-two *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, does there appear to be a direct link between Boase's main text and the accompanying visual images. This could be seen to reduce the overall unity and effectiveness of the narrative. Although this is a scholarly work, there are none of the trappings of a conventional biography or theological history

book such as a table of contents, footnotes, glossary, bibliography or index. There is simply a list of illustrations.

Boase is careful to make distinctions between fact and fiction in the available evidence about Nebuchadnezzar. For example, he notes that it is difficult to match the biblical story of the king's seven years of insanity in the wilderness with detailed archaeological and literary information about his reign. "No gap in the record of his reign of this, and an event so dramatic and so prolonged must have left some trace of its happening. The king died in 561, apparently still prosperous".[58] Boase then cites evidence from one of the Dead Sea Scrolls to suggest that Nebuchadnezzar's successor, Nabonidus, was absent on two occasions, once on a military campaign and later due to 'an unpleasant skin disease', and that a Jewish writer had revealed some knowledge of this. Either of these stories could have given rise to the myth about a period of insanity suffered by Nebuchadnezzar.

Boase is able to explain Boyd's imagery with admirable clarity. For example, in his concise annotations to *Nebuchadnezzar Protecting his Gold*, **(7.20)** he not only quotes the appropriate reference to the Book of Daniel (Ch. VII, v.19) but writes: "Here in a horrible eviscerated pose, the body is stretched over heaped gold, as though its whole substance was turning to it but unsustained by it". This scene has been foreshadowed early in the story where Boase explains:

> According to a Jewish legend, Nebuchadnezzar in his arrogance sought to envelop himself in a cloud so that no human eye could see him. In this he was likening himself to the invisible majesty of God, and it was for this hubristic design that he was smitten by madness and sent forth to lodge with the beasts. The great cloud is in Arthur Boyd's painting streaked with gold and there is the flicker of gold lying by the king's side, for it is on his riches that his overweening ambitions were based.[59]

Boyd could have depicted other known facts about Nebuchadnezzar's earlier achievements or the Babylonian civilization, rather than concentrating on the human form of one stripped of all his former glory. For the name of Nebuchadnezzar could be

associated with the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; or the high gateway leading out of the great city, its adjoining walls decorated with dramatic designs of huge winged bulls; or the distinctive shape of the towering ziggurat. Had Boyd been interested in 'illustrating' Boase's text or in conveying detail he could have concentrated on the more obvious detail in the manner of the late nineteenth-century academic painters. Boyd for example, does not include Nebuchadnezzar's successful military campaigns, especially his conquest of the Jewish people on his way to Egypt and their subsequent captivity in Babylon. Boyd ignores events and details such as these.

The focal point of the biblical version of the story is that pride in human achievement must not be separated from an acknowledgement of divine authority and the consequent moral responsibility of nations, rulers and people. Nebuchadnezzar is actually used as God's instrument in chastising the Jewish people for their disobedience to the Mosaic Law. Boyd chooses yet another aspect of the story of Nebuchadnezzar: the thoughts and motives of the king himself. The painting, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Tree*,**(7.16)** reveals the source of the problem: the king's pride in his own capacity to achieve his ambition to bring the whole world and all its wealth within his power. It is upon the personal character of Nebuchadnezzar that Boyd chooses to focus his attentions. A comparison can be made with Shakespeare's study of the same 'fatal flaw' in the tragedy of Macbeth who grew more and more ambitious to become King of Scotland. Boyd, like Shakespeare, identified with the suffering of an individual, in spite of the fact that the suffering was self-inflicted. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, Boyd has produced thirty-four paintings and eighteen drawings which trace the progressive degeneration of the king's inner life, starting with indulgence in attractive fantasy and culminating in a total fall from grace. Whether the punishment is inflicted from outside or from within, the effect is the same upon this tormented individual. Boyd captures Nebuchadnezzar's suffering with tremendous power combined with intense compassion - for example, *Nebuchadnezzar*

Wailing in the Wilderness **(7.21)** and *Nebuchadnezzar Blind on a Starry Night* .**(7.19)** Then comes the transition, slow and painful admittedly, but permitting the possibility of a new start. Unlike Macbeth whose moment of truth comes too late, with Birnam Wood apparently coming to Dunsinane and bringing inevitable defeat, Nebuchadnezzar finds the strength to return to sanity, but only through some kind of benign or superhuman grace. The shining stars and the rainbow are used as symbols of hope. The gradual process of redemption is wonderfully conveyed in the painting entitled, *Seated Nebuchadnezzar and Crying Lion*, **(7.17)** and *Lion's Head in a Cave and Rainbow.* In his brief comments on these scenes, Boase is apt and cogent: "The lion lays its head in the king's lap and weeps, and the beast's sympathy brings a semblance of restored humanity to the outcast ruler", and "The lion's head is transfigured in a silver light, while above shines a rainbow, the sign of hope". The shining Pliades in *Nebuchadnezzar Buried in Sand and the Seven Sisters*, is likewise a sign that Nebuchadnezzar's struggle to regain balance and right direction in his life will not be in vain. His humanity will be restored. The image of the potter recalls Jeremiah's allegory in which the potter (God) can reshape something once created (a human life) but which has been broken. Surprisingly Boase offers no comment on this. There is as well an autobiographical dimension in the image of the potter which Boyd expanded in his *Potter* series of 1966-68 dedicated to his father Merric Boyd.

The concluding pages of Boase's text contain what amounts to a catalogue of works of art - visual, dramatic, operatic - based on the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Finally, Boase writes a tribute to the art of Arthur Boyd presented in the book:

> Here is a subject that leads immediately into Boyd's preoccupation in many other works with the fusion between man and natural forces, the involvement with man and beast. The terse statements of the biblical text release a series of visions, as apocalyptic as those of Daniel himself . . . Behind the figures there are traces of the Australian landscape of his early inspiration. But if these works are enriched with such references, the myth is newly and freshly recreated, a second Daniel come to judgement of our own contemporary obscure and secret

impulses.[60]

Boase makes a sober assessment. It is clear that Boyd has not merely illustrated a strange story left over from antiquity but infused it with contemporary meaning. It is arguable that Boyd presents a series of passionate and rich visual images - the impasto effect of tubes of paint applied direct to the canvas alone has an electrifying effect - but that the meaning comes from a creative and varied interpretation on the part of viewer or commentator. These are images that can be interpreted in many ways and like numerous works by Boyd, the meaning is enigmatic and intuitive. What the collaborative project achieves, given a scholar of Boase's calibre is to present Boyd with elegant and rich information but no prescription or constraint whatsoever. This could not have suited Boyd better as exemplified by the vast number of canvases produced on the subject of Nebuchadnezzar subsequent to the publication, as testified to by Boase himself. Boyd's repugnance towards The Vietnam War influenced the *Nebuchadnezzar* paintings, particularly the protestors who set fire to themselves on Hampstead Heath during the late 1960s.

Over a period of fifteen years from 1973 to 1988, Arthur Boyd collaborated with the poet Peter Porter, to produce four major works: *Jonah* (1973), *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975), *Narcissus* (1984) and *Mars* (1988). This experience proved valuable to both of them.

Like Boyd, the Australian Peter Porter was to spend most of his working life in London, having arrived there in 1951. Although Porter had been recognised by critics in England from the early 1960s when the first volume of his poems was published,[61] his distinctive qualities were not appreciated by many people until much later. When over three hundred of his poems were eventually published in the Oxford Poets series,[62] he was widely acclaimed, both in Britain and Australia, being regarded by many reviewers and critics as equal to any contemporary poet in the English language. One reviewer, the London poet Alan Brownjohn, attempting to correct a

commonly-held assumption that Porter was merely a new-comer, "located Porter firmly in the British-European setting",[63] contending that "Porter had arrived in England with 'a much more informed, complex and ironic view of his native Australia' than the 'uprooted outsider' image allowed".[64] Brownjohn added "Porter came with a whole cluster of ironies which he was to carry and refine throughout thirty years of an extreme commitment to the value and seriousness of poetry".[65] Another reviewer, Peter Levi, asserted that "Porter's refreshing humour was an aspect of his seriousness, his refusal of dishonesty".[66] Some critics stressed the importance of Porter's exposure of social and political problems. Alan Bold, editor of the *Penguin Book of Socialist Verse*, summed up Porter's social vision as a search for "grace in a grotesque world".[67] Assessing Porter's place in Australia's literary history, Julian Croft has written:

> More than any other Australian poet, Porter combines with ease and fluency both the traditions of early modernism and the directions taken by English poetry in the 1930s and 1940s. His debt to W.H. Auden is evident, as is debt to the anti-romantic social commentary of the Movement, but in his combination of a sceptical distrust of any system and a sense of the individual's powerlessness he is an Australian modernist poet, as he is in his belief that there is a redeeming force in human affairs — and for Porter, that force is art.[68]

In his critical biography of Peter Porter, Bruce Bennett has argued that critics who describe Porter as "democratic" do not go far enough. He points out that:

> while sharply critical of tyranny from above, Porter was also critical of the tyrannies of mass culture. He wanted democracy to be large enough to include doubters, sceptics and critics and to prevent the relegation of 'high-art' to the status of an upper-class activity . . . Porter's social poetry cannot be separated from his personal poetry as some of these reviews and commentaries might suggest — world, author and text are in a process of continual and dynamic interaction.[69]

In the early 1970s Porter faced some of the most difficult questions of his life, though his harshest experience had been the death of his mother when he was only

nine. He was still trying to come to terms with questions of exile and identity, for, although fascinated by European history and culture, he felt drawn back to Australia. Then in 1974 a love-affair and the suicide of his wife "led to a deepening appreciation of the complex relationship between pain and art". A profound questioning of origins and allegiances also followed.[70] Later, in commenting on the fact that Porter never wrote directly about his bereavement, Bennett explains: "What got in the way of 'letting go' for Porter, in the face of his grief, pain and confusion, was an almost stoical sense of responsibility".[71]

Living in an urbanised, industrialised society in which there was generally little awareness of the past and the significance of history, combined with a marked decline in religious faith and observance, Porter felt the need to write about these subjects. He was highly critical of simplistic political and economic solutions to the world's problems. Ideologies both of the Left and the Right had already proved too dangerous. Even the rhetoric and actions of the most high-minded environmentalists could be exposed and satirised. His biographer, Bruce Bennett, has noted: "Porter's orientation as a person and poet is to seek sustenance in the past rather than place his faith in a brave new world of the future".[72] In another passage Bennett writes: "Porter's poetry and ex-cathedra statements continually reject the notion that abstract theories can have an explanatory power superior to the plural, arbitrary insights of dreams and everyday observations, tempered by wide reading and art".[73]

The two Australian expatriates, Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, had met on various occasions in London in the 1960s. In 1971 the publisher T.G. Rosenthal proposed that they collaborate on a major work combining their spheres of art and their creative talent. After considering several possibilities, they both agreed. The biblical allegory of Jonah proved to be a rich source of inspiration for each in turn. **(7.27,7.28)**

In the parable of Jonah, God calls Jonah to go as a prophet to the city of Nineveh (capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire in the seventh century B.C.). He is to

warn the people that God will destroy their city if they do not repent of their evil ways. (It is an historical fact that Nineveh was in fact destroyed by the Babylonians in 612 B.C.). Jonah does not want to do this, so he decides to go in the opposite direction, away from God's presence. He boards a ship bound for Tarshish. God causes a great storm. Jonah hides in the bottom of the boat. Everyone else on board fears shipwreck. They find Jonah and question him. They cast lots to find out who has caused their plight: it falls on Jonah who admits he is to blame because he has disobeyed God. They are reluctant to punish him but he offers to let them throw him into the sea. As soon as they do so, the storm stops. Jonah is gobbled up by a whale. While in its belly for three days, Jonah prays to God for his release, promising to do whatever God wants. The whale is made to spit Jonah out on a beach — that is, release him from his punishment. Jonah prophesises to the people of Nineveh. They repent. (Jonah had hoped that God would destroy them.) God then teaches Jonah a lesson in compassion, using a gourd plant as an illustration.

The last section of the story of Jonah carries its essential theological message. God is infinitely more compassionate and merciful than we can imagine. God cares about all those people in the city of Nineveh, and even their livestock. Having given them the chance to repent and seen them put on "sackcloth and ashes" (the traditional Jewish sign of repentance), God withholds the wrath that otherwise would have befallen them. Jonah is quite petty and self-centred in his response: he just sulks because God has not destroyed them. Yet he himself has only recently been spared mercifully by God after repenting of his own disobedience in running away from his responsibility.

Recalling the experience of the following year, Porter writes:

> Arthur and I hardly consulted each other; I simply sent him the poems in batches of threes and fours as they were finished. I remember starting the whole series in Venice and ending it in a spurt a year later in London. I was not prepared for the scale and opulence of Arthur's

> response. He poured into our collaboration an extraordinary cornucopia of pictures — charcoal and ink drawings, etchings, drypoints and, for the cover, a beautiful colour painting of Jonah being vomited on to the beach by the whale . . . In many respects, this our first book together remains Arthur's most prodigious response to my writing. Here are many images new to the Boyd iconography — the predatory gull, the night-time womb, the foreshortened corpse . . ., the magic mirror, and assorted flowering gourds, pharoses, palms . . . Also are such abiding Boyd images as dogs muzzled and unmuzzled, the garlanded penis . . ., sharp-beaked birds, and all the writhing lovers and wrestlers. There were originally over a hundred pieces of art work and Rosenthal and I were determined to get as many into the book as possible, with the result that we overcrowded it and perhaps muffled the effect of Boyd's prodigious imagery.[74]

For his part, Arthur Boyd appreciated the "powerfully pictorial" qualities of Porter's poetry, its emotional range and inventiveness.

> His language is universal ranging from humour to great tragedy so that my response to his work was automatic. I have always felt that as far as I was concerned there was no stage at which I was ever stuck for a stimulus and I've never known this same rapport. His work seems to me to combine delicacy and strength. The whole of each group of poems always gave me all I needed and more to create the visual contributions to those joint ventures.[75]

In the writing of their second collaborative work, *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1975), which had been suggested by George Mora, owner of the Melbourne Gallery, Porter reveals that neither he nor Arthur Boyd saw the famous tapestries in the Musée de Cluny in Paris until after they had completed their own interpretation of the myth, though Porter at least had seen some reproductions of it.[76] Unable to find adequate authentic information on the subject, Porter says, "I made up much of the material myself",[77] though including in the epilogue, imagery similar to that of the Cluny tapestries.

The myth of the Lady and the Unicorn tells of an Emperor who likes animals and keeps some on his estate. He orders his officials to arrange for every kind of creature to be collected into his menagerie. As time goes by he becomes more fanatical

about possessing every type of real and imaginary animal but still he has no unicorn. This mythical creature is believed to live in the region but no matter how hard they try to devise traps for it, they have so far been unsuccessful. Meanwhile, the Unicorn falls in love with a young lady. For some time they are happy together but the Lady becomes bored and eventually betrays the Unicorn to agents of the Emperor who immediately clap the Unicorn into prison where it dies.

Presumably the moral of the story is that acquisitiveness leads at least to disappointment, if not to wanton destruction. Boyd and Porter focussed their attention on the changing relationship between the Lady and the Unicorn, rather than taking much interest in the acquisitiveness of the Emperor.

Porter and Boyd finally produced a book of "twenty poems, each faced by a large-scale etching. Thus *The Lady and the Unicorn* **(7.37-7.42)** is a more unified work than *Jonah*".[78] Porter himself feels that he achieved "the necessary virtuosity" in *The Hunters Set out to trap the Unicorn*, **(7.39)** and is pleased with "the chic irony" of *The Unicorn before the Emperor*; his parody of Auden in *The Lady's Wedding*, and "imaginative prose writing" in *Death of the Unicorn*.[79] Continuing his assessment of their combined work, he writes "Boyd's pictures are striking in every sense, none more so than the jacket illustration which also faces the tenth poem . . . Each picture is white on intense black and the mastery of sheer line and complexity of drawing is virtuosic, surpassed in Boyd's work only by the similar extravagance of his pictures for *Narcissus*.[80]

The legend of Narcissus tells of a handsome young man who becomes so infatuated with the reflection of his beautiful face in a woodland pool that he cannot bear to leave it. A nymph called Echo falls in love with Narcissus but her attentive presence tends only to increase his obsession with his appearance. Inevitably he disregards everything around him and ceases to do anything to maintain his own physical and mental wellbeing. His death might have gone unnoticed but, following the best tradition of classical mythology, he is saved by the gods, undergoes a

metamorphosis and is immortalised in the lovely golden flowers of the daffodil family which grow under trees beside pools and appear to be looking down towards their own reflection in the water. "Narcissus" is the botanical name for daffodils and jonquils.

The Viennese psychologist Sigmund Freud used the term "narcissism" to describe not simply vanity but a pathological state in which a person's entire attention is constantly focussed on self-indulgence, leading to gradual deterioration and ultimate self-destruction.

In 1975 Porter and his two daughters spent five months in Sydney. Their visit to the Boyd home at Riversdale on the Shoalhaven River led Porter to a new appreciation of Australia, which Boyd was already re-discovering for himself after a twelve year absence. Much later Porter was to write:

> Both at Riversdale and Bundanon he has found an Arcadia which is neither idealised nor compromised by Rousseauian preconceptions. The many paintings which Arthur has made of the river and its environs are, I believe, the most important breakthrough in painting of the Australian landscape since the days of Streeton and Tom Roberts. Soon after Arthur went to the Shoalhaven he told me of his vision of the river and the rainforest behind it as a sort of *paysage* for Narcissus. Water is not only the element of reflection and of self-knowledge, but its laziness is the other side of the coin of its life-giving function.[81]

Years later, Porter composed *River Run*, tracing the river's course and using this as a kind of allegory of human life from birth to death.[82] His initial response to his first experience of the rainforest near the Shoalhaven River was to write *The Orchid on the Rock*.[83] It is interesting in retrospect to compare ideas and images in this poem with themes in *Narcissus* especially the emphasis on "self" and "reflection" in the first two verses:

> Two hundred yards from the houses
> Where the sounds of trees commence
> With water always in descent
> From the hundred veins of the creek,

The orchid rears its dozen necks
On a cushion of self: not scent
But a colourless colour, so intense
It eats the light, brings us up close.

Perhaps fifty years' battening on
Its own dead limbs have sent
Those roots like rivets into the rock —
The air brings stories of other lives:
Lemons returning to wildness, leaves
A hundred feet overhead which mock
The ferns, a fallen cedar bent
To the creek to kiss the sun.[84]

Porter's poetry in *Narcissus*, expresses ideas originally suggested by Arthur Boyd and derived from an idea Boyd himself conceived for *Narcissus*, subsequently jointly developed by both of them over a period of about nine years. The original Greek legend tells how the young man Narcissus became so fascinated by the water's reflection of his beautiful face and form that he stayed there admiring it until he died, the only redeeming feature of the story being the metamorphosis at the end: Narcissus is changed into the beautiful flower that still bears his name.

Porter's biographer, Bruce Bennett, perceives the following connections between Porter's personal situation in the mid-1970s and the kind of poetry he produced in response to the Narcissus myth: "It is not surprising that in the period following his wife's death, Porter should have puzzled deeply over whether a self as dubious as his own could be lovable".[85] Yet Porter admits to finding solace in Blaise Pascal's notion that "the self is somehow hateful and lovable at once".[86] This seems to account for Porter's introduction of the beast or monster, to disrupt the tranquillity of Narcissus' idyllic world, not from outside but within:

Dear Surface, I open
my eyes above you
and let a carnage
loose upon the earth —
Dear Sir Face, you

are tomorrow's monster.[87]

Nevertheless, Bennett notes: "This monster had its progenitors further back, as early as *Beast and the Beauty*[88] and is a recurrent metaphor in Porter's work".[89] In complete contrast to all the dark connotations conveyed by the image of the beast, we find Porter's highly original and amusing satire on those who would assert that Greek legends cannot be transposed into the Australian landscape. In *Echo's Moon-Calf,* Part XIII, a barbecue with the poet Les Murray is humorously told. Porter has Echo, the nymph who fell in love with Narcissus in the original legend, saying:

> Trust the Greeks to get the legend wrong.
> I was out walking the world of myself
> sniffing subtleties of reflections
> in patches of the rain forest, nymphing
> the shade with my very pretty toes,
> when I came across this obscene beast
> picnicking. He had his Esky,
> three pounds of sirloin steak,
> Alice B. Toklas's relish in a cup
> and cole slaw vacuum-sealed. His barbecue
> was across two rocks and he was throwing
> gum-balls on the fire to make it flame.
> To cut a long story short, it was
> Narcissus — not considering his own face
> but loving his own body by stuffing it
> with food. He gave me half a glanc
> and hid his uncooked steak.
>
> Tell the researchers this,
> I'm the one who's self-obsessed,
> I'm always coming back to find where I have been
> to hear the world anticipate my voice.
> And this uncouth Caliban has had
> my fame. I'm supposed to be mad for him
> and die in the hills when spoken to.
> All he said to me was a lot
> of trendy trash about the need for truly
> native legends.[90]

Peter Porter praises the visual images in this collaborative work in these terms:

> Arthur Boyd's 'Narcissus' engravings are among his most audacious works. The cover and the image facing poem 12 are colophons of the self-loving spirit prostrate before its own existence. Pelicans, ferns, rainbows, crows, lyrebirds, tooth-baring heads strangely like pictures of fibroid growths, fossils and skulls, and Arthur's ever-present flowering penises dominate an iconography which is always self-consuming. Out of this welter of threat and vanity, he has made an amazingly beautiful world where all things are contingent upon each other. The picture attached to *Echo's Farewell* shows Boyd's art at its most commanding and elegant. A wild Narcissus leans from the river bank to embrace a swan, which is reflected in the water, though he is not . . . Even without having to decipher the significance of the symbolism, the viewer is conscious of the link between self-love, beauty and death.[91]

The question of the use of classical imagery and eclecticism is raised by Porter's poetry and Boyd's art. Their collaborative projects are based on sources from the past and they work on the subjects from different angles. For both Boyd and Porter, the use of art and literature from the past is based upon a great appreciation of culture and the European tradition that they wish to take part in; both also wish to make a contribution to the world of ideas and a comment on contemporary issues of morality and politics.

Peter Porter points out that the use of a classical myth is not a new phenomenon. The actual issue of myth and its contemporary relevance is confronted in the *Narcissus* poems where Porter mocks the notion that in Australia there is no place for the classics:

> Who wants Narcissus? Who wants
> Zeus? Who wants Apollo? When
> we have the Australian place gods.[92]

Porter's use of figures and references from classical mythology and the European cultural tradition met with criticism from fellow Australian poet Les Murray who claimed that Australian culture should draw from its own experience and not depend on the European cultural tradition.[93] In defence of his own position Porter

points out that, "you can turn the characters of early history into mythology but what you cannot do is produce a unified myth system because that takes generations to build up and in any case what we call myth is really religious belief and theology".[94] He defends his use of a wide range of sources from antiquity and literature by pointing out precedents throughout history — that a Shakespearean play, for example, contains an unself-conscious blend of Greek and Roman antiquity and Christian iconography. In the Australian context Porter adds that the British immigrants were themselves a cultural mix and what they transferred to the New World (Australia or America) was not a pure cultural heritage.[95] In a poem called *The Prince of Anachronism* he writes: "All ages are contemporary, the present is made up of the past". He has never felt embarrassed by the anachronistic combining of aspects of Australia and what is known of classical Greece.[96]

Boyd felt readily able to exploit Peter Porter's poetic talents, whose views on art and literature were both considered and articulate. When Boyd first worked with Porter he told a friend that he felt very privileged to be working with a poet of Porter's calibre;[97] he clearly provided great inspiration over a considerable period of time and on as many as four impressive projects.

Narcissus **(7.29-7.36)** combined a number of themes of interest to painter and poet. Boyd was in the initial stages involved in both his new property and home on the Shoalhaven River in New South Wales (after a long absence from Australia) and also in the mythological subject of Narcissus. He interested Porter in the prospect of another collaborative project, who then agreed to write fresh poems on Boyd's new subject. The Narcissus project was therefore Boyd's idea; for initially Porter had no clear idea of what he wanted to write about. Artist and poet mutually then agreed that the project would address the "prevailing solipsism of self-awareness".

In Australia the question of the validity of the use of European classical myths in an Australian context had been posed before. In poetry the verse of Hugh McCrae or in art Sydney Long's paintings of nymphs were examples of previously acceptable

works.

> However, during a national revival of the arts in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, the claims of the indigenous Australian stories and experience were understandably being pressed by certain artists and critics, following their neglect through a protracted history of Australian cultural subservience . . .
>
> The new work of Boyd and Porter was therefore destined to swim against some prevailing currents. This was a situation to which Porter warmed, enjoying the adversarial role. He entered this part of the project with ebullient humour and, in a spirit of multiculturalism, ridiculed the 'exclusion' by some Australians of an allegedly unhealthy migrant.[98]

The Australian poet Judith Wright had written two poems on the subject of Narcissus, *The Lake* and *Interplay.* Her approach was metaphysical; Porter and Boyd on the other hand focussed on "the implications of sexual narcissism. Images of erotic excitement or gratification through extreme admiration of the subject's own attributes recur throughout *Narcissus*, and are given special intensity by the spellbinding etchings of Boyd on their intense black background."[99]

Boyd and Porter planned to deal with Narcissus from a number of different angles, however, from each, Narcissus would be seen as a kind of protagonist. The first poem was written by Porter in Sydney in 1976 on return from a visit to the Shoalhaven where he stayed with the Boyds.[100] *The Painters' Banquet* eventually became the fourth poem in the published collaborative project. The poem was started as a tribute to painting *per se* — following an interest in the Renaissance architect and chronicler Giorgio Vasari — *Lives of the Artists* (1550/1568).

> The basic image is of eating. Painters like to represent banquets but they are also like caterpillars in museums. They like to eat their way through paintings. I called it *The Painters' Banquet* because in Vasari he describes how shepherd boys started to draw on rocks and were noticed and brought to Florence.[101]

So Boyd takes his cue from Porter's last verse; the idea of the shepherd-artist taken up by a patron having an obvious appeal. It is a tender, almost naïve image visually but the unlikely juxtaposition of the head in profile, the descending coins of patronage and the innocence of the young aspiring artist creating an image of a lamb (of God?) presents a poetic visual image to accompany and embellish Porter's words in *The Painters' Banquet.*

> . . . This is the sumptuous gallery of those
> Who have eaten the world. Oh the ochre,
> Burnt Sienna, the pulverising red
> Which rocks have earned from the sun —
> In little spaghetti-making towns
> The dead artificers' creations burn
> All sophistry from pilgrims' eyes.
>
> It was a wonderful party to be at
> We write our thank-you letters
> In the world's far-reaching galleries
> Who will clean up now? All the water
> In the reservoirs won't remove the stain
> From Golgotha. We think back instead.
>
> Little Andrea has drawn a sheep
> With a bright stone upon a smooth-faced rock
> Lucky for him a Medici is passing,
> Soon the banquet will be set again.[102]

Narcissus as a project is characterised by the juxtaposition of unlikely events and descriptions both in the poetry and the etchings. It is a 'cabinet' piece in the sense that it resembles a collection of ideas, apparently random but refined and brilliant combining tributes to music, painting and animals. Porter and Boyd comment on the concept of *Narcissus as Critic* ("I also did Narcissus as a critic which only goes to show that Narcissus could not live he could only look at himself which of course made him a very good critic."[103]) and Porter chose *Narcissus among the Anthropologists* **(7.32)** ("I've always disliked anthropology, regarding it as a form of

eavesdropping."[104]) Some poems, for example, *At the Palace* were just fantasies. Towards the end Porter wrote a poem about a Rainbow Maker which Boyd followed with a number of fine paintings.

For Boyd the introduction of a rich collection of literary images and ideas was a great gift. He responded to Porter's elegant and complex associations with enthusiasm and great sophistication. A number of Boyd's images are violent and dramatic matching Porter's brutal words; *Narcissus Laments Orpheus* **(7.33)** is a particularly hellish picture of iconoclasm and murder. The war-like faces on Boyd's *Narcissus* the attacking beast entwined with the human figure occupy almost all of the picture plane — white figures on a velvety black aquatinted background in which a crucifix is placed. This is an image of human beings as Porter describes:

> We are a disgusting species really. Human beings are greedy, nasty and cruel except they do have a few divine attributes as well. Narcissus is all about awareness of self that is hateful and out of that you create and understand the world around you. You have the only material to make anything that is beyond yourself. Pascal said 'the self is detestable but if you are too aware of your detestableness it gives you *carte-blanche* to hate everybody else. Narcissus was just the Greek who looked into the water — it's the myth of self-absorption.[105]

In *Piero di Cosimo on the Shoalhaven*, Porter transports the Florentine painter to Bundanon, Arthur Boyd's newly acquired property in New South Wales. He adds, "It's meant to be a joke, but there's more sophistication in it than most people allow".[106]

On the subject of myth in general in the context of the *Narcissus* collaboration Porter states:

> The only actual centralised myth that exists in Australia other than what we have built up from historical events are aboriginal myths. I don't believe that they can be used by white men unless they have managed to absorb it as naturally as say the Renaissance absorbed the

Classical mythology.[107]

The final collaborative project on which Boyd and Porter worked was *Mars*, published in London in 1988. For Boyd the *Mars* project illustrated with drawings precipitated a great many important large paintings. *Mars* was the Roman god of war thus it gave both Porter and Boyd the opportunity to focus on the issues of war, the arms race and the environmental disasters caused by materialism and avarice. *Mars* is dramatic and energetic after the self-reflection of *Narcissus*. Boyd had addressed the subject of war in his paintings of the late 1940s; his response to the holocaust, for example, was expressed in *Melbourne Burning* (1946-48), Porter too had written on the subject.[108] In *Mars* Boyd and Porter deal with the seriousness of their subject with ironic humour.[109]

In this further collaborative project Mars is placed in the modern *milieu* of America. Porter makes allusions to Nixon, impeachment, Vietnam, missiles. Boyd uses the digger's hat. The multiplicity of images and metamorphoses are very powerful:

> This is strong material, showing the endless recurrence of war despite the best intentions of peacemakers. The warlords change, but the perversions of lust and power remain In one of Boyd's images, while Mars molests a naked woman above planet earth, her tears of blood rain upon Australia. Australians are part of this world of powerful play, violence, anger and lust, attracted, like others, to a 'heedlessness of life'.[110]

Porter's poetry and Boyd's drawings and subsequent paintings are demanding. Both present original and sophisticated social comment as well as a sustained psychological insight throughout their creative endeavour that is rare in contemporary art and poetry. Boyd and Porter were a forceful combination and produced collaborative projects of truly great standard. Boyd's most outstanding painting on the subject of war, with Mars on centre stage was *The Australian Scapegoat Tryptych* (1988). Although he benefited greatly from his collaborations with Porter, he

continued to develop his own imagery when the published project was complete. The painting, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Nine, *Allegory and Myth* shows Boyd's genius for drawing together a plethora of remarkable and pertinent images from cultural sources, autobiography, and natural phenomena. No artist in Australia has presented his audience with such audacious and dramatic statements about all aspects of life, love, death and the future.

NOTES CHAPTER SIX

1 Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967, p.16.

2 Peter Porter, "Working with Arthur Boyd", *Westerley*, March 1987, No. 1, p.69.

3 *Ibid.*, p.69.

4 *Ibid.*, p.71.

5 Letter from Professor Bernard Smith, 12 May 1992, London. The original preface is not in the Boase papers in Magdalen College Oxford. The Antipodean Manifesto has been discussed in Chapter Three, *Post-War Australia, 1945-1959.*

6 T.S.R. Boase, "Introduction", Franz Philipp, *Arthur Boyd*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1967, p.16. Cited in Chapter Six.

7 *Ibid.*, p.16.

8 Conversation with Arthur Boyd, Suffolk, March 1992.

9 Everyman edn., 1947.

10 Boyd had met MacDonald, a dealer and collector in Sydney in the late '40s

11 John Olsen, an Australian painter of landscape, born Newcastle, trained, worked and taught in Sydney at this time.

12 Conversation with Arthur Boyd, June 1992.

13 *Ibid.*

[14] Boyd's interest in grinding pigments and making paints was precipitated by the shortage of manufactured paints in Australia during the war. A fellow artist Albert Tucker helped Boyd (c.1941) to obtain materials of various kinds from ICI including epoxy colours. They were both very interested in the technical aspect of painting and took certain information from Max Doerner's, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting, With Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*. Boyd himself had some knowledge already passed on from his father who ground pigments (particularly copper and cobalt) in his pottery to make glazes.

[15] See J.O. Dobson, *The Little Poor Man of Assisi: a Consideration of the Life and Significance of St. Francis* London, 1926.

[16] Arthur Boyd interviewed by Peter Fuller, *Modern Painters*, No. 22, June 1990, London, pp.20-30.

[17] Telephone interview with Arthur Boyd (in Italy) June 1992.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, André Deutsch, London, 1986, p.57.

[23] *The Legend of The Three Companions* is believed to have been written by Leo, Angelo and Rufino, who were with Francis throughout many of the crises of his career. Boase, *St. Francis of Assisi*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1968, p.14. For detailed discussion of the sources for the life of St. Francis, see Marion A. Habig (ed.), *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2nd edn., 1979, 'Introduction', pp.5 -22.

[24] Boase, *op.cit.*, p.12.

[25] *Ibid.*, p.20.

[26] *Ibid.*, p.26.

[27] For details see Boase, p.14 and M. Habig, *op.cit.*, pp.177-612.

[28] Thomas of Celano, *Life of St. Francis*(*Legenda Prima*) quoted by Boase, *op.cit.*, p.30.

[29] *Fioretti*, *ibid.*, p.36.

[30] *Ibid.*, p.36.

[31] Interview with Arthur Boyd, March, Suffolk, 1992.

[32] *Fioretti*, quoted by Boase, *op.cit.*, p.36.

[33] *The Legend of St. Clare*, quoted *ibid.*, p.58.

[34] *Ibid.*, p.50.

[35] *Ibid.*, p.11.

[36] *Ibid.*, p.16.

[37] *Legend of The Three Companions*, *ibid.*, p.55.

[38] *Ibid.*, p.55.

[39] *Ibid.*, p.54.

[40] *The Legend of St. Clare*, quoted *ibid.*, p.58.

[41] *Fioretti*, quoted *ibid.*, p.62.

[42] Boase, *ibid.*, p.62.

[43] George Kaftal, *St. Francis in Italian Painting* London, 1950, p.26.

[44] *Ibid.*, p.70.

[45] *Fioretti*, ibid., p.72.

[46] Boase, *op.cit.*, p.80.

[47] See Kaftal, *The Saints in Tuscan Painting*

[48] *Fioretti*, Boase, *op.cit.*, p.88.

[49] Letter from Bernard Smith, 12 May 1992, London.

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] *Ibid.*

[52] When I interviewed Arthur Boyd he remembered the term "iconomorphic" with enthusiasm and believed that it did in fact contribute to his confidence in changin his work in stylistic terms.

[53] *The Mirror of Perfection*, quoted by Boase, *op.cit.*, p.102.

[54] *Ibid.*, p.108.

[55] Boyd himself considered that while a parallel can be made between the religiou work of Blake and his own that they differ in methods of working. Boyd considered that unlike Blake his own images were in a state of flux and that the developed in the process of creating whereas he felt that Blake created the imag in his head and then transferred it to paper. Telephone Interview with Arthur Boyd (in Italy) June 1992.

[56] Boase, 'Introduction', Franz Philipp, *op.cit.*, p.17.

[57] Arthur Boyd, *Nebuchadnezzar*, Text by T.S.R. Boase, Thames and Hudson, London, 1972, p.42.

[58] *Ibid.*, p.30.

[59] *Ibid.*, p.8.

[60] *Ibid.*, p.42.

[61] Peter Porter, *Once Bitten, Twice Bitten*, Scorpion Press, Northwood, 1961.

[62] Peter Porter, *Collected Poems*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984.

[63] Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile — Peter Porter and his Poetry*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 198.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 199.

[66] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 202.

[68] Julian Croft, "Responses to Modernism, 1915-1965", *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, L.T. Hergenham (ed.), Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 426-7, cited *ibid.*, p. 200.

[69] Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. xii; see also, Chapter 8, "The Easiest Room in Hell", pp. 149-176.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 193.

[72] *Ibid.*

[73] *Ibid.*, p. xv.

[74] Peter Porter, "Working with Arthur Boyd", *Westerly*, No. 1, March, 1987, p. 72.

[75] Arthur Boyd, Letter to Bruce Bennett, 1989, Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

[76] Peter Porter, *Westerly, op. cit.*, p. 72.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[80] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

[81] *Ibid., p. 75.*

[82] Peter Porter, *Possible Worlds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

[83] Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

[84] Peter Porter, *Collected Poems*, p. 240.

[85] Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 229

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 229

[87] Peter Porter, Poem II, "The Making of a Monster", in *Narcissus* (with Arthur Boyd), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[88] Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

[90] Peter Porter and Arthur Boyd, *Narcissus*, p. 33.

[91] Peter Porter, *Westerly, op. cit.*, p. 78.

[92] Peter Porter interview with Janet McKenzie, London, 1995.

[93] "Les Murray warned me that bringing Greek gods and mythological creatures to Australia just wouldn't do — the hemisphere wouldn't accommodate them. But I had observed that the Shoalhaven at Riversdale looked very like the background to Piero di Cosimo's mythological study in the London National Gallery, usually entitled "Cephalus and Procris". Florentine painters unashamedly yoked together bits of the Arno and the *contado* of their native city and Greek and Roman stories, so why should I not do the same." *Westerly, op.* cit., p. 78.

[94] Peter Porter interview with Janet M cKenzie.

[95] *Ibid.*

[96] Peter Porter, "The Prince of Anachronism", from *The Automatic Oracle*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, discussed by B. Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

> "The alliance between verse and visual art freed Porter to exercise a form of anachronism which his persona in *The Prince of Anachronism* had proposed: 'History's perspective is a lie. Art is the same age eternally' while this 'late modernist' view of history poses problems for the historiographer, it allowed the poet to present Mars after his birth in the following terms:
>
> > 'He lies in a bassinette a seed of time.
> > Like all babies, he resembles Winston Churchill o
> > some Japanese War Lord'."

[97] The friend was Jutta Fischer of Fischer Fine Art, London. My conversation with Dr. Fischer, London, 1997.

[98] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[100] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

[101] Peter Porter interview with Janet McKenzie, London, 1995.

[102] Peter Porter and Arthur Boyd, *Narcissus*, *op. cit.*, p. 8-10.

[103] Peter Porter interview with Janet McKenzie, London, 1995.

[104] *Ibid.*

[105] *Ibid.*

[106] *Ibid.*

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] See Peter Porter, "Annotations of Auschwitz", *Collected Poems, op. cit.*, pp. 30-21, and "Somme and Flanders",*ibid.*, p. 40.

[109] In "A Guide to the Gods", *Fast Forward*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, p. 43, according to Bennett:

> "Porter's practice here suggests that gods which cannot be spoken of irreverently and humorously do not qualify for a place in his pantheon at this stage; and that their chief revelation is about the humans who construct them."

Bruce Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 235.

PART IV : LANDSCAPE AND MEANING

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Underlying Role of Landscape

Landscape plays a vital and varied role in Boyd's *oeuvre*. As a young artist he painted landscapes near Melbourne which were naturalistic and accomplished. When he lived with his grandfather at Rosebud he worked hard, often producing two or three paintings in a day. He took a systematic and disciplined approach and his output was in turn considerable. The pastoral landscapes of grazing sheep and the beach scenes where children play exude a general tranquillity and innocence. At an early age Boyd became prolific. The discipline and the encouragement he received at home held him in good stead when his idyllic life suffered the dislocation of war. Boyd's pre-war landscapes display a debt to and an admiration for the Heidelberg artists: Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Charles Conder. The intense high-pitched colour of Roberts's landscapes, the majesty of Streeton's pastoral vision and the poetry of Conder's seascapes all contributed to the early vision of Boyd.

In the Boyd family itself a precedent was firmly established in landscape painting. Arthur Boyd's grandfather, Arthur Merric Boyd was a well-known landscape painter and so too was his uncle Penleigh Boyd.

> Indeed, the young Arthur Boyd and his uncle Penleigh were among the last of those artists who might be said to have made a personal and creative contribution to the naturalistic impressionism of the Heidelberg School, Australia's first authentic school of painting which was itself, for the most part, a kind of celebration of Australia's age of pastoral innocence, when sheep upon sunny pastures depicted a literal symbol of the young country's prime source of material wealth.[1]

Both family members and the work of the Heidelberg artists whom he admired encouragedBoyd to pursue the *plein air* tradition. Years later he recalled:

> When you are out painting *plein air*, in the landscape you are such a tiny part [of the landscape] — at the same time it takes the weight of invention in one sense, because you have it all there and the invention doesn't intrude — you've got it all laid on — in a sense — and you can changeround bits and pieces.[2]

Boyd's admiration for early Australian painters especially the Heidelberg School encouragedhim to pursue the Australian phenomenon of the "artist camp". Clem Christiansen recalls:

> In the sand dunes near Cape Schanck, on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, are the remains of what might be called 'the last of the artists' camps'. Tea-trees and sand have almost obliterated a shack made of drift-wood where Wilfred and Alan McCulloch, Arthur Boyd, Harold Beatty, and Donald Town spent many holidays during the six years before the outbreak of war. In a recent letter Arthur Boyd described those years as 'some of the happiest of my life'.[3]

During the period before the outbreak of war in 1939, Arthur Boyd and Wilfred McCulloch "painted a lot together — mostly Van-Gogh-inspired post-impressionist landscapes. They first met at Wilson's promontory when Arthur was 14 years of ageand Wilfredabout 22. With Alan McCulloch (who was studying at the Gallery School at night), they often went on painting excursions in Arthur's grandfather's ancient car."[4] Boyd's distress at the state of war can be found in his paintings, the lyrical landscapes giveway to dramatic expressionistic images. While he himself did not experience armed combat he was deeply shocked at the deaths of his close friends WilfredMcCulloch and Arnold Gardner on the Malayan Peninsula. "The military took over the Cape Schanckarea and put a shell through the roof of the shack.

Local farmers removed much of the timber."[5]

Looking back on the period it is possible to experience the tranquillity and youthful happiness experienced by Boyd and his artist friends: a simple, uncomplicated and unrestrained palette, the replication of shifting weather conditions. *Rosebud Landscape with Grazing Sheep* (1937) **(8.1)** is a subliminal rendering of big space and sky, utterly minimal, yet compellingly beautiful. This is the Australian landscape without myth, symbolic meaning, tragic omen or any romantic embellishment. The paint is handled with growing dexterity, the strokes become thicker, control and scope for experimentation within the medium reaches increased potency. Two years later, in *Mordialloc Creek* (1939) or *RMS Oronsay at Port Melbourne* (1939), these technical and compositional experiments are further realisable with success. The sombre, overbearing gloom of landscape, *Bacchus Marsh*, (1943), **(8.2)** now fills the composition and percolates through every stroke of the brush. The happiness and benign frame of childhood and youth was permanently destroyed in the painter's disposition by the advent of human conflict. Paradise was overtaken by Purgatory and then Hell.

During the war, elements of the landscape — for example, the tree of life — were often used rather than the whole landscape. Boyd thus developed a symbolic shorthand in the process of developing his own personal language of painting. The naturalistic landscapes of the 1930s were replaced by an urban landscape: a surrealistic stage on which figures were introduced to play out the absurd and grotesque roles of life during war time. Elements of the landscape were endowed with significance, trees entwined with each other denoted the personality of non-human beings. An anthropomorphic approach endowed the landscape with numerous powers and meaning. Boyd began as well to include as central elements of his landscapes events from his own life. Thus autobiography makes the landscape an extension of his

own experience of life and his individual psyche.[6] A personal myth is created and developed throughout his artistic life which prompts a comparison with William Blake:

> where Blake drew upon earlier art for the proto-typical emblems of his art — on Roman carvings of Jupiter, for example, for his symbol of the authoritarian father-figure — Boyd drew his symbols directly from early-life experiences.
> The cyclic vision may also be seen in Boyd's painting, *The Shepherd.* Here man may be seen as man lost and returning to the vegetable kingdom, an image possibly inspired by Blake's illustration of Canto XIII of Dante's *Inferno.* 'The Wood of the Self Murderers', which was available to him in the original in the National Gallery of Victoria. Boyd greatly admired and studied the Melbourne collection of Blake's illustrations to Dante.[7]

Towards the end of the war Boyd painted *The Hunter* **(8.3)** paintings revealing a renewed interest in the Australian landscape, in this instance however, a melancholic and symbolic landscape in marked contrast to the pastoral vision of the early landscapes. When figures are included they are often gnome-like or monstrous. The paint application is crude yet the strokes create a sense of rhythm, echoing the violent forces of nature. The post-war landscapes are unprecedented in Australian art history. Boyd's passion for the Old Masters, especially at this stage Pieter Breughel and Hieronymous Bosch, enabled him to create the most dramatic allegorical "world landscapes" in the history of Australian art. Taking a bird's-eye view and high perspective, Boyd's landscapes quite suddenly became densely populated. All manner of human activities take place from the mundane to the profound, from the absurd to the profane. Here the Breugelesque Australian landscape becomes a place pulsating with life. Biblical, literary and autobiographical events take place side by side: the central message is that of a world that has abandoned order and morality for the pandemonium of human folly, capable of mass destruction. A carnival atmosphere

prevails yet macabre and senseless activities abound. This is the lunacy of war, a nihilistic world. Boyd's technical facility improved greatly as he studied the Old Masters and employed their techniques. The palette in the Biblical paintings of the late 1940s is richer and stronger than the naturalistic paintings done in the mid-1930s. Using grounds of chrome green and red in a similar way to the Venetians (e.g. Tintoretto) Boyd introduced an intensity of colour and fine gradations of tone to the Australian landscape. Cobalt blue for skies and sea in egg tempera and oil paint gave his landscapes the symbolic richness of a Medieval or Renaissance painting, even though at this stage he had not seen any works of the European Renaissance tradition in their original form.

Following his monumental Biblical paintings of the late 1940s which culminated in the *Grange* murals, Boyd sought the experience again of pure landscape painting in the arid Wimmera landscape of Victoria.

In the colonial-like Grampians subjects which recall von Guerard **(10.24)**; to Gaffney's Creek subjects of the late 1950s (accompanied by John Perceval) which recall the claustrophobia of the Hunter paintings of the 1940s there is a breadth and richness [8] that displays Boyd's facility for absorbing art-historical sources to be combined with his own vision of the landscape in Australia **(10.17)**.

The desert landscape of Australia's centre has inspired many artists this century. Boyd travelled to Central Australia in 1951 and drew elements from the landscape and the Aboriginal inhabitants in sketchbooks. It was not the grandeur and dramatic nature of the landscape itself, that interested Boyd at this stage with great formal possibilities, but the dispossessed Aborigines who lived in shanty towns along the railway lines. When a full six years later he began a series of paintings devoted to the tragic plight of the Aborigines the landscape was now of minimal importance. The figures were to occupy almost the entire picture plane; as the series was developed the background became increasingly muted. The mythical perspective of Boyd thus

became more Australian and specifically regional but no longer necessitated an accessing of the elements traditionally associated with the antipodes: bleached gum trees and blue skies. In this way Boyd made a major contribution to Australian landscape painting and Australian cultural awareness. His ability to place real rather than mythological Australian experiences in a universal context and to widen the relevant appeal of art have been among his greatest contributions.

Boyd's *Bride* paintings created a *tour de force* in London when they were shown there. In a one man exhibition at Zwemmer's Gallery in 1960, which preceded the Australian exhibition at the Whitechapel, covered by Bryan Robertson in 1961, discussed those qualities of Australian art that appealed to an older cultural tradition and conceded thus that Australian painting had come of age.

In the second half of the twentieth century the public imagination in Britain, and to a lesser degree in America, became attracted by the old sagas about the exploration of the Australian outback. Whereas for example Burke and Wills, known as incompetents, had been down-rated as heroic material by this time, there had been exceptions in this reappraisal. Nolan had already traced in his work the famous and tragic journey, seeking to reconceive it with a new series of paintings. Other painters such as Albert Tucker, and David Boyd, soon joined Nolan in revisiting this extraordinary human tragedy. In each case there was a degree of ridicule directed at the pompous attitudes affected by European suprematism. As Tim Bonyhady explains:

> The deaths of Burke and Wills at Coopers Creek have come to represent both the unwillingness of Europeans to learn from the Aborigines and their more general inability to understand the land.[8]

While Nolan's paintings mythologised these disasters, the Australian-born writer Alan Moorehead in his book on Burke and Wills, *Cooper's Creek*, chose for marketing purposes to romanticise the landscape. So this landscape myth, as

Bonyhady notes, was perpetrated effectively as cliché, by Moorehead, ". . . yet Moorehead kept hammeringaway at the frustrating, enigmatic emptiness of Australia trying to mythologise the landscape".[9]

Nolan indeed picked his moment to return to the subject of Burke and Wills **(10.34)**. For Arthur Boyd, approaching the subject somewhat later, there had been the need to focus distinctly upon the realities of the landscape in line with a growing human interest in the vicissitudes experienced by the Aboriginals. For instance, in the *Bride* series (1957-60), the love which fused white bride with aboriginal lover probed further into the real dilemma of Australian society than ever before. And *Lovers with a Bluebird* (1962) **(5.10)** continued this.

Boyd in fact seemed to lead his contemporaries into a more modern condition, extending such awareness beyond the purely pastoral or mythological. As Bryan Robertson was to write:

> The awareness has been immeasurably helped by the enthusiasm shown for Australian art and the practical help given to visiting Australian artists by Sir Kenneth Clark, who in 1949 on a visit to Australia first saw and recognizedthe signs of Australian maturity and independence in painting. Other enlightened men in London have also contributed to the present sympathetic and inquisitive mental climate. Sir Colin Anderson, with his Australian wife, has always supported the liveliest artists in this country, privately as a patron and collector, as Chairman of the Contemporary Art Society or as the present Chairman of Trustees of the Tate Gallery.[10]

But Robertson was referring still to the experience of these new Australian paintings only in terms of the extent to which they incorporated a specific range and intensity of colour, a "bitter-sweet" romanticism, an "acid sentimentality" a "slightly self-conscious tactile quality, so passionate and yet on occasion so detached", and most specifically a sense of a landscape "waiting to be humanised". Admittedly, "this comparatively white race lives in proximity with an old race, the aboriginals".

Robertson admits that Melbourne is "the stronghold for painting concerned with a more direct imagery and an attempt to build up a mythology of content". Perceptively, Robertson then goes on to note "the work of those Melbourne artists who have evolved something like an Australian mythology" and how in Australia it is criticised "because of the possible dangers of over-exploiting national themes and natural features of Australia, in an opportunist sense. Its enthusiastic reception in Europe, so starved for valid or fresh imagery, has aroused mistrust".[11]

Boyd of course was already moving beyond just such pitfalls, as he explored the Aboriginal plight in his new work as exhibited at Zwemmer in 1960. But for Kenneth Clark, the success of the extended mythology sustained through the Whitechapel exhibition of 1961, was too compelling. He moved for its total acclaim:

> So in Australian landscape painting, as in all great landscape painting, the scenery is not painted for its own sake, but as the background of a legend and a reflection of human values.[12]

For Nolan, the former perhaps was the priority. For Arthur Boyd, the latter was paramount. Such a differentiation was to be reflected in due course in the acquisition, at Kenneth Clark's bidding, of major Nolan works for the Tate Gallery. The trajectory of Boyd's career would follow a different course.

Was the Australian desert, now duly sanctified as the subject for high art exported to Europe, thus to be synonymous with T.S. Eliot's great modernist text, *The Wasteland*, as many commentators have since suggested? And to what extent in the second half of the century was this to be interpreted as an escape from more immediate and pressing urban considerations?

Boyd's 1956 journey to the bush close to the Australian Alps presaged an explosion of painting which had made up for an apparent lull from 1953 to 1955. It was on the wave of this output that Boyd arrived in London in 1959. From this point,

the *Bride* paintings worked on in Australia and brought for exhibition to London (Zwemmer Gallery 1960), followed by the *Lovers* series of work established Boyd, in London, as more than a landscapist-mythologist in the vein appreciated by Clark.

In the later 1970s, mythic figures were infiltrated back, both human and non-human. Life studies of dead animals reveal a consummate skill in total representation. Landscape itself, in Boyd's paintings becomes less malevolent, as in *Flood Receding in Winter Evening* (1981) **(8.10)**. Soon after a steady flow of large canvases, particularly of Pulpit Rock, both extend and harmonise the painter's world, a settled domain in the Shoalhaven location. Often, with others, it is the continued and growing experience derived from living in a given landscape that establishes this balance. In Boyd's case it is merely seen to be a pause before recurrent intimations of human imperfectability re-assert themselves in his work.

In Boyd's *oeuvre*, *Flame Trees, Horse's Skull, Black River* (1983) **(8.12)**, signified "an interval of calm",[13] to use Sir Kenneth Clarke's words, a moment of contemplation before the drama of his 1980s painting unfolds. In contrast to the tranquillity of the Port Phillip Bay beaches painted by Arthur Boyd as a young man, the Shoalhaven River paintings of *Bathers* **(8.14)** shriek with the action of speedboats, the drama of cavorting figures and the brash colours of heat and flesh. In 1985 Boyd was prompted by a new element in life on the Shoalhaven — water skiers and high speed boats that invaded the natural beauty spots near Bundanon. Besides the obvious danger to bathers and picnickers there, Boyd was alarmed by the damage to the riverbanks from erosion and the hedonistic instinct of the people who lay prostrate in the sun, oblivious to the power of destruction in nature. Boyd uses the image of flippered bathers as red as lobsters to represent a society that closes its eyes to the spiritual and intellectual aspects of life.

Boyd had first seen Cézanne's *Bathers* **(8.16)** in the National Gallery, London, in 1960,[14] although he did not draw on the work until the early 1980s. Cézanne's work

encouragedhim to use the figures to a formal end as well as a metaphoric end. Cézanne created a triangle with his figures which is in the same vein as Boyd's use of the figure holding an animal by its hind legs, first in the 1940s and in various poses throughout his work. The effect on Boyd's *Bather* pictures is to build the figures into the centre of the vast canvases. The energy created by them intensifies the prominence and power of Pulpit Rock. The hedonism Boyd depicts takes the place of religion and the sun worship which takes the place of moral values is appropriately positioned under 'Pulpit' Rock:

> In some of these paintings I placed the worshipping by the figures of Pulpit Rock, in a way that made them look as if they were climbing up and taking it over.[15]

In *Bathers with Skate and Halley's Comet* (1985) **(8.15)**, Boyd's extraordinary talent and integrity triumphs. It epitomises many of Boyd's preoccupations: the grandeur and sublime beauty of the landscape and nature, evidence of which was the appearance in 1975 in the Southern Hemisphere of Halley's Comet. Painting on a much greater scale, the work juxtaposes the landscape of the imagination onto the Shoalhaven riverbank that is peopled with lurid and grotesque bathers, a dog and a skate. It is a work of great drama and tension — of the duality in Boyd's experience: natural beauty versus technology, innocence and vulnerability versus danger and destruction. Contemplation is destroyed by hedonism; materialism dominates spirituality. The figures look up at Halley's Comet in the same way that they gazed towards Pulpit Rock in *Bathers, Speedboat and Pulpit Rock* (1985).

The inclusion of Mars, the god of war in *Riverbank with Bathers and Mars* (1985), **(8.18)** makes an allusion to the selfish nature of certain sports and war games. The bathers in Boyd's scheme signify the enemies of nature — those in our society with no regard for the balance of nature and for the future of the planet. As Peter

Fuller stated:

> As the [*Bathers*] series progresses, the figures get higher and even more lurid and preposterous, but somehow, the effect of the whole painting suggests a fusion of the figure and background which is enormously powerful. That whole theme seems to flow into that group of paintings . . . on the theme of *The Australian Scapegoat.*[16]

The illustrations made by Arthur Boyd for Peter Porter's poems of Mars (published 1988)[17] familiarised the artist with the characters of Roman mythology. Although Boyd had always shown a keen interest in classical mythology and Biblical imagery in the history of painting in the European tradition, he rarely produced images with standard attributes, and so the reading of his works is at times elusive and enigmatic. What is clear is that Boyd's imagery possesses a passionate moral purpose and that it is created in an original and brilliant manner. The characters from Roman mythology share Boyd's stage with characters from his own life and from Australian history: World War I diggers are used to represent the vulnerable victims of war. In the *Mars* drawings and in *The Australian Scapegoat Triptych* (1988) **(8.20)**, Boyd creates a world shorn of hope, faith or prospect — an allegory of decadent humanity beyond hope of redemption. The skate appears in *The Australian Scapegoat* (1987) **(8.19)**, and in the *Mars* drawings because it too displayed a form of vulnerability. In art-historical terms it recalls Chardin's famous *Lenten Still Life* in the Louvre.

> It lives face down in the water and feeds without opening its eyes. It's the kind of blindness that exists with people who make armaments and go to war. When it is wounded or destroyed or gutted it has the look of the same kind as a war wound.[18]

The Australian Scapegoat (1987), was named after the title of Peter Fuller's book.[19] Boyd was an obvious choice for Fuller who championed a return of figuration to art. The layers of meaning in Boyd's work, and Boyd's predilection for allegory

and myth appealed greatly to him. In addition, Fuller had visited Australia to give the Power Lecture in 1982 and like so many visitors was overwhelmed by the scale, the light, the artistic activity that was taking place there and with the individuals that he met. Fuller and Boyd became close friends and according to Boyd, Peter Fuller exerted considerable influence on his work. He was devastated by Fuller's death in a car accident in 1990:

> I found our mutual interests totally enhancing. . . even uplifting of the spirit. It may perhaps seem a little strange but I felt it rather as a welcome surprise that Peter, a young man the age of my own children, should have been such a strong influence on my subsequent work. Our conversations enlarged my vision of what could still be done. In Peter's writings and in his talk and in *Modern Painters* it seemed that a fresh light was appearing.[20]

In *The Australian Scapegoat* (1987), the imagery comes from the *Book of Leviticus XVI* in which the goat carries the sins of the people of Israel into the desert. Holman Hunt's famous painting of the same subject was painted *in situ* in the Holy Land; Boyd's was painted in Suffolk after storms ravaged large parts of England in October 1987. Boyd uses the Australian war hero Simpson of Gallipoli in 1915, a medical orderly who carried soldiers to safety on his donkey before himself succumbing to enemy attack. Boyd substitutes the donkey for Holman Hunt's goat. The church in the background is in fact Ramsholt church which can be seen from Boyd's Suffolk studio. It represents a moral structure but seen against the aftermath of the devastation wreaked at Gallipoli, it represents a fragile and impotent set of values in a world that has become instead obsessed with self-aggrandisement and destruction. These themes have been central to Boyd's work since the 1940s.

The Australian Scapegoat Triptych (1988), is one of the most important works in Boyd's *oeuvre*. It is the culmination of many years of work that express the artist's opposition to the violence and cruelty of war. Using Mars, the Roman God of War, it

refers in terms of thematic concern to Boyd's apocalyptic 1940s paintings where pandemonium and human folly dominate his Breughelesque compositions. In *The Australian Scapegoat Triptych* (1988), the three vast panels create the effect of a frieze. One reads the linear creation not from left to right but from any point. The cumulative images are highly personal; the artist is the crippled clown on the right — Boyd's portrait of the artist as being in "the unnecessary business of entertainment" but he takes place ironically in the same theatrical phenomenon as Roman gods and goddesses. The triptych draws on a number of images used by Boyd throughout his career. It is predominantly red — the martial colour, the colour of the planet Mars. The panels are divided like Boyd's Shoalhaven River paintings into three planes: sky, land and water. He uses the starry night from his Bundanon paintings of the early 1980s creating *A Frieze of Life* to quote the title of Klimt's important work. Boyd's triptych contains the three elements of Earth, Air and Fire.

On the left panel the female figure is seated in the cane chair that Boyd painted in their house at Murrumbeena, and which he used repeatedly in the autobiographical series of works in the 1960s that referred to his parents: *Potter's Wife Decorating a Pot* (1967-69), and *Potter: Artist's Father in Armchair with Pot and Bust* (c.1969) **(2.34)**, both exploit the formal possibilities of the rounded cane chair — both the sensual shape and the warm wicker colour. The despairing figure in the wicker chair in *The Australian Scapegoat Triptych,* is indeed the mother of the soldier (and Boyd's own mother). The soldier's face glistens with pride, heightened by stage make-up resembling an Ensor or Goya mask. The mother holds a white feather for cowardice. Running in their direction from the middle panel is a figure holding the decapitated rooster who represents Alectyon who was turned into a cock by the cruel Mars. The figure here is typical of Boyd's personal treatment of classical figures: in this instance the figure is a composite of a female— Venus, the goddess of love and beauty — but Boyd bestows upon her lurid red skin and deformed legs and feet which suggest that it

is not Venus but Vulcan, the God of Fire and forger of the instruments of war, who fell to earth and was crippled. The manner in which the figure's feet are painted suggests that Vulcan has landed on the water from a great height. The figure may, for the purpose of the artist's mythology, be both Vulcan and Venus who were in some stories married. The scapegoat in the central panel is a composite ox-goat-sheep animal, falling head first like Boyd's *Narcissus* figures. To the right of the scapegoat, in the shape of Michelangelo's *Pietà* is Pallas Athena, Goddess of War, wearing a helmet with the Australian Rising Sun badge, lamenting the dying victim on her lap. On the right hand panel is a grotesque Venus wearing a soldier's hat symbolising love overwhelmed by science. Her head is in a book, on which a cryptic reference is made to Einstein — X=McE? (instead of Einstein's $E=Mc^2$). Although Einstein's symbol (which represents the invention of modern science, of the Brave New World) is neutral in itself, it is here used by Boyd in a derogatory manner to refer to the alliance between science and capital. The figure's excrement is made of gold and she defecates into a helmet. The laughing cripple on the far right of the composition is a figure used by Boyd in 1973[21] and represents the artist. Speared by paintbrushes and wearing a clown's ruff Boyd's portrait of the artist is a grim but potent image. The butterflies allude to the transitoriness of human life and above the bones suggest the soul leaving the body in death.

Most paintings done on the riverbank were comparatively small — the largest would have been three by four feet. The large works such as *Bathers with Skate and Halley's Comet*, **(8.15)** were painted in the studio either at Bundanon or in Suffolk. On one occasion Boyd painted with his brother-in-law Sir Sidney Nolan *en plein air*.

> Sid didn't do much outdoor painting but he came along and we put up an awning, made a proper tent. It was very high up looking down on the river and over towards Nowra. We both did pictures and we left them there overnight for a couple of days and someone came along and took the tent and the awning and all the boards and planks and the

> paint and the brushes but they left the pictures. Sid was upset and made a great play about the fact that they didn't want the pictures. The picture I did there I later used quite a bit. It had large overhanging rocks with Mars.[22]

In the 1980s Boyd worked on a number of Australian commissions. *Shepherd by Black Creek* (1984-85) **(8.29)**, was one of three maquettes produced by Boyd at Bundanon at the request of Romaldo Giurgola, the architect for the new Parliament House in Canberra. The work, some six metres long, refers back to *The Shepherd* and *Lovers* paintings of the 1940s, Boyd explains:

> It was thought to be too dark and a bit odd . . . The architect didn't think it would be suitable, and so he took one of those very upright tree paintings. *Shepherd by a Black Creek* would have worked as a tapestry but not for where it was intended.[23]

The final product from Boyd's 'upright tree painting' was indeed the world's second largest tapestry. Dwarfed only by Graham Sutherland's tapestry in Coventry Cathedral, the monumental work for Australia's Parliament House, Canberra, represents two-and-a-half years' work for thirteen weavers (1986-88). It was the most ambitious venture attempted by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in Melbourne. It is sixteen times larger than Boyd's original painting: constructed of panels measuring nine metres by twenty metres; a total of 180 square metres of tapestry.[24]

To celebrate the bicentenary of Mozart's death in 1991, Boyd in 1990, with the fellow Australian poet Geoffrey Dutton and musician Berndt Benthaak (who had lived in Australia for seventeen years) conceived of an Australian version of *The Magic Flute*. Boyd was to be responsible for the sets and costumes as well as the unification of the visual with the dramatic and musical elements in the opera.[25] Geoffrey Dutton pointed out that although the idea of an Australian production of Mozart's opera sounded bizarre, its success would come from: "The meeting of two

opposites, the conjunction of which, as William Blake said, begets energy and progression."[26]

He could well have been describing a great deal of Arthur Boyd's painting. Dutton himself was responsible for the daunting task of an entirely new translation of the libretto. Barry Humphries was to play Papageno, Yehudi Menuhin had agreed to be the musical director and Greg Hocking was to be the producer. Dutton described *The Magic Flute's* suitability:

> On the one hand we have in Australia an uninhibited, immediate and often splendidly vulgar freshness of approach to life's mysteries, and a bawdy humour that is at the same time amenable to a touch of sentimental reconciliation. Papageno is of course vital here. He will have access to the Australian vernacular, used in such a way as to have a universal application. On the other hand there is in Aboriginal Australia the most ancient of lands and peoples. The flora and fauna are not only unique but the living expression of this ancient quality. And in Aboriginal culture there still exists the most profound engagement with the wholeness of things, that nature and mankind are as one. All this might seem far from freemasonry but it should not be. As Freemasonry is concerned with those fundamentals of all religions common to all men, so it is in harmony with the Aboriginal belief in Dreamtime totems, that all people are brought together by the common bond of their natural background and its various animals and rivers and waterpools and mountains.[27]

The Australian setting enabled the team to develop the theme in *The Magic Flute* of the feminine world of night, magic, fairytale, nature and aboriginal mystery. *Black Pool and Queen of the Night* (1990) **(8.28)**, possesses a primordial quality. Using as a starting point a pool at Bundanon, Boyd created a powerful and mysterious image. Those involved with the production had stayed at Bundanon with the Boyds and explored the bush for suitable backdrops. The opera included exotic birds — the three ladies have head-dresses and Papageno has a lyre-bird's costume. The quality in *The Magic Flute* appealed to Boyd whose own work is rich in the

birds — the three ladies have head-dresses and Papageno has a lyre-bird's costume. The quality in *The Magic Flute* appealed to Boyd whose own work is rich in the energy precipitated by opposite forces. "Papageno is always the agent of mixing high and low, the sacred and profane, high emotion and deflating humour."[28] The opera in fact includes numerous unlikely juxtapositions: a Japanese prince, convicts, a Governor Macquarie look-alike, kookaburras (snake-eating birds) eighteenth-century architecture, and a barbecue and Government House, Canberra.

Within Boyd's *oeuvre, The Magic Flute* **(8.26)** fits naturally. Although funding was sadly never raised for the unique production, Boyd's paintings were used as backdrops for performances of Mozart in London, and they were shown in New York (Boyd's first exhibition there). They also formed part of the exhibition to celebrate the artist's seventieth birthday at Fischer Fine Art in London in June/July 1990. *The Magic Flute II* used the precipitous backdrop reminiscent of many of his Shoalhaven River paintings. *Green Queen of the Night,* **(8.27)** like the *Bathers* paintings, combines the splendour of nature with allegory — the Queen projects the selfish greed and possession of her magic powers. Boyd's painterly handling gives the work a theatricality and sensuousness, whilst presenting again a personal mythology to denote the dual nature of one's existence.

On first meeting the art critic Peter Fuller following a 1984 journey into North-Western Australia, Boyd was encouraged to revisit the scapegoat theme first elaborated by the English painter Holman Hunt in 1854, and a work from which Fuller was compelled to draw comparisons for Boyd. The Holman Hunt painting was much admired by Fuller as a clear call to humanity to seek redemption, through art. Clearly Boyd's *The Australian Scapegoat* (1987), an even bigger painting than its worthy predecessor, addresses a perceived Australian dilemma, one of guilt confronted by alien nature, an absence of triumphalism is conveyed: mere survival is uppermost for humanity. So while European post-modern guilt is engendered by the wholesale

destruction of nature and global resources in the headlong rush of society for material satisfaction, that of Australian consumer society comprises a further reaction to exploitation. This is directed at the wholesale extermination and expropriation on the sub-continent of its original inhabitants. From their harmonious compatibility with nature over many millennia,Boyd reflects upon their reduction in less than a century to acute debasement and dire distress. In contrast to other contemporaries such as Nolan and Williams, Boyd reacts to this plight in a particularly direct, innocent manner.

Fuller had sought to recognise in the Australian desert a metaphor for all societies where nature itself was under threat:

> The stubborn refusal of a Sidney Nolan, or a Fred Williams, to accept the intractability of the Australian landscape, their insistence upon realising an aesthetic response to it, was not only something new and admirable in art; it bore witness to that irrepressible impulse in the human breast to affirm beauty in, and unity with, the natural world, regardless.[29]

Arthur Boyd's standpoint has to be seen to be different, indeed exceptionally so. For Boyd alone had recognised the key tragedy which overlays the continuing battle with nature in Australia, and world-wide, and its sublime aftermath as well as acknowledging that such landscapes can be haunted, literally resonant with human conflict by race or creed, to the extent that the redemption sought comes to be denied. In Boyd's scenario, there is no certainty that all will come good. Even at Bundanon, where grazing and sound cultivation of the land has been pursued by a sequence of settlers over many decades, the high surrounding bush and rock outcrops that encircle this curve in the Shoalhaven river seem occasionally resonant with a legacy of conflict, and the haunting memory of the disaffected.

The openness and tranquillity of Boyd's earlier landscapes can thus now only

be alluded to nostalgically and never recaptured. This has its parallel in the earliest experimental encounters in Australian history, between the surveyor Thomas Mitchell and the Aboriginals.[30] At first these exchanges took place against a background of promise. These journeys could lead to new areas for grazing being opened up, and that, as signs given to Mitchell indicated, the Aboriginals could also benefit from the process.[31] But this world was lost, and conflict was inevitable, where one race was taking over territory previously 'managed' by others over several millennia. One has only to contrast the natural equanimity of Mitchell, reinforced by his technical mastery of exploration and survey in his gradual, friendly progress through alien territory, with the extraordinary presumption and arrogance of the Burke and Wills fiasco glamorised and mythologised by Boyd's contemporaries. The Aboriginal plight (discussed in Chapter Three) was not a popular subject for artists in the mid-twentieth century in Australia. Arthur Boyd, Noel Counihan, Yosl Bergner, David Boyd, Russell Drysdale, however, all attempted to create images that would draw attention to individual anguish and multifold distress of the dispossessed Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. A precondition is a state of innocence. But as with Mitchell, who "was not optimistic about the future. He thought that despite all this care it might still happen, as it had in the past, that the civilised world would supplant the Aboriginal race".[32] So with Boyd, innocence is replaced by a degree of rational scepticism. This emerges clearly in the later works in the Shoalhaven series. And as Arthur Boyd recognised more than Peter Fuller ever could there might be no redemption now, even through art.

NOTES CHAPTER SEVEN

1 Bernard Smith, "Art in a Mystical Tradition", *Hemisphere*, Vol. 16, No. 4, April 1972, p. 19.

[2] Arthur Boyd interviewed for *Arthur Boyd: South Bank Show*, London Weekend Television, Produced and Directed by Don Featherstone, Edited and Presented by Melvyn Bragg, 1986.

[3] Clem Christiansen, "Arthur Boyd and the Last of the artists' camps: the camp at Cape Schanck", *Broadsheet of the Contemporary Art Society of NSW*, 1963, p. 17.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[6] Peter Herbst, "The Murrumbeena Experience", *op. cit.*, p. 215.

> "Habitat and self are not separate entities, neither can be understood in isolation. We perceive something of ourselves reflected in Nature, even when our perception of the wider scene is naïve and fresh. Thunderstorms or drought-stricken paddocks are not needed to make Arthur's canvases sombre or brooding. Since the land and the dwellers on the land are so intimately intertwined, the inwardness of his pictures is ultimately not personal."

[7] Bernard Smith, "Art in a Mystical Tradition", *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[8] Tim Bonyhady, *Burke and Wills, From Melbourne to Myth*, David Ell Press, Sydney, 1991, p. 311.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 305, also p. 372. Bonyhady quotes from, Geoffrey Dutton, "Burke's Will and Testament", *Australian Book Review*, March 1964, p. 96.

[10] Bryan Robertson, "Introduction", *Recent Australian Painting* 1961, Whitechapel Gallery, June-July 1961, p. 6.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[12] Kenneth Clark, "Introduction", *Recent Australian Painting* 1961, Whitechapel Gallery, London, June to July 1961.

[13] Kenneth Clarke, *Landscape into Art*, John Murray, London (1949), 1976, p. 33.

[14] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Peter Fuller interview with Arthur Boyd, *Modern Painters*, *op. cit.*,

[17] Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, *Mars*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1988

[18] Arthur Boyd, quoted in *The Adelaide Advertiser*, 26 February, 1988.

[19] Peter Fuller, *The Australian Scapegoat*,

[20] Arthur Boyd, "Tribute to Peter Fuller", *Modern Painters*,

[21] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Australian Woman's Weekly*, February 1988, p. 8.

[24] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Peter Fuller, "The Geography of Mother Nature", in *The Iconography of Landscape* (editors Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels), *Essays on the symbolic representation, design, and use of past environments*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p. 29.

[30] Thomas Mitchell's experiences and appraisal are fully described in Don Baker's *Thomas Mitchell the Civilised Surveyor*, Melbourne, 1997, which gives a detailed account of Mitchell's careful and humane attempts to establish good relations, notably on his fourth exploring expedition in 1845.

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Landscape Transformed Through Painting

A major departure took place from for example, the delicate spirituality and harmony achieved in the *St. Francis* cycle of 1966-68; and although there are haunting undercurrents in the *Potter* series of 1967-68; and great dramas in the subsequent *Nebuchadnezzar* series, the paintings known as the *Caged Painter* **(9.1,9.2)** series are among the most difficult to fathom appear as the most vehement of Boyd's statements about the human condition. These works reveal Boyd's thoughts at a private and essentially subconscious level. Art-historical research as such does not of its nature provide any ready explanation for this process. Tom Rosenthal for his part has maintained that any individual in possession of such prodigious talent, seemingly bound by a compelling humility, cannot but hold within himself powerful emotions of anger and torment.[1]

Tom Rosenthal knew Boyd when he first moved to London and was the driving force behind the collaborative projects that Boyd carried out together with T.S.R. Boase and Peter Porter. He was also the publisher responsible for six separate volumes of collaborative work, and while at this publisher, of the important studies by Franz Philipp and also by Ursula Hoff.[2] Rosenthal recalls sitting for a portrait with Boyd. The sitting had lasted from lunchtime until dinner and when the portrait was finished Rosenthal was shocked by the challenging nature of Boyd's insight. Rosenthal considered himself now after all to be a young English critic, quite comfortable in his shoes, and with an appropriate identity. Boyd's portrait was both powerful and prophetic, portraying Rosenthal as a haunted-looking European intellectual probably of Jewish[3] extraction, that Rosenthal in his inner mind then realised was both accurate and perceptive. Rosenthal's view of Boyd is useful when one comes to assess or comprehend the meaning behind, for example, the deeply personal and enigmatic works painted between 1972 and 1973.

> One can rarely describe gut reactions, but Arthur's brain is found at work in a big way in these works. It is his way of talking out. If he'd been successfully analysed, he would not have needed to paint such works! He is an artist obsessed with painting, with extraordinary energy. He experiences physical restlessness and is highly strung and volatile. He is a strange combination of being rootless (in his nomadic existence) and being fixed (owning numerous properties). He both mocks his friends and himself.[4]

It is a Freudian analysis, in Rosenthal's view that enables one to get to grips with the meaningbehind specific elements in Boyd's work of the early 1970s.

Central motives such as gold, and excrement occur repeatedly for example, in Boyd's work, and highlighthis central preoccupations as an artist.[5] Indeed, in *Dreams in Folklore* Freud makes the connection between the child's pride in relation to its own excrement and adult's attitudes (preserved in the unconscious) toward material treasure.

> How old this connection between excrement and gold is can be seen from an observation by Jeremiah: gold, accordingto ancient mythology, is the excrement of hell. In dreams in folklore gold is seen in the most unambiguous way to be a symbol of faeces. If the sleeper feels a need to defaecate, he dreams of gold, of treasure.

(Freud also develops the link between defaecation-dreams and impotence-dreams or the fear of impotence.) In Boyd the fear of impotence relates in this period to his fear of impotence as an artist.

Another element, the cage, is used in several instances in this series of paintings. Indeed, Tom Rosenthal suggests that when the figure of the painter is wearing the cage over his head, combined with elements of self mockery, that Boyd incorporates an ironic twist by reference to his brother-in-law, and fellow painter Sir Sidney Nolan: the rectangular cage over the head parodies the crude helmet adopted by

Nolan's Australian hero, Ned Kelly.[6] And other images of the cage are equally enigmatic,employed to create cruel, harsh imagery. Indeed the cage is the embodiment of incarceration. Elsewhere, chains are employed, to contain and control dogs. In direr circumstances, human figures themselves are enchained.

Individuals that become self-obsessed with guilt, or display an exaggerated degree of humility with others, can make prisons for themselves, believes Rosenthal.[7] In deploying in his work the extremely repressive devices of the iron cage and chains, Boyd offers an image of hopelessness and injustice. Boyd recalls a scandalous case of Aborigines who were chained up to the trees and left out in the extreme heat.

Redemption through form, to fall back on Peter Fuller's terminology, seems in such work to be denied. However, in *Caged Figure with Dogs* (1973) **(9.2)**, the artist seems located happily outside the cage itself, and not within, and working rapidly on an image of imprisonment or of chastisement, without actually becoming the victim. Thus he has only the searing heat and the semi-desert conditions to contend with. By extension, the painting *Figures, Bent Tree and Yellow Sky* (1973) **(9.3)**, offers a complex variation on the several themes that characterise Boyd's most potent images of this period. Lovers are portrayed, watched, while persecuted, trapped inescapably in a cage. This is a bleak image of loneliness, compounded by the absence of fulfilment. The emotional power of the work that could be derived from the sexual act of union is eroded by voyeurism itself in this ultimate invasion of the lovers' privacy. *Figure and Laughing Head* by contrast is a macabre and tragic work. The smug laughing head surrounded by dark smeared paint is not attached to any body. Only a hand appears to be touching what could be a drawing board but then also resembles the lid of a coffin. The shrouded figure below, in this confrontation with death itself, is indistinct and enigmatic. The female figure to the left of the painting, sketched rapidly and expressionistically in paint, demonstrates the tragic plight of one violated, stripped of all esteem and dignity. Nor is it even clear as to whether this is a case of

physical rape or of some alternative form of debasement, equally shattering. This work in particular seems to represent those aspects of human life and experience which deeply sadden Boyd through such senseless cruelty. Such profound sentiments as are expressed here are also expressed by Boyd in the *Mars* drawings, potent comments on the imbecility of war.

In the painting *Figures, Money and Laughing Cripple* (1973) **(9.5)**, two figures are seen huddled together in fear, their respective genitalia explicitly rendered to shock. They are visibly distorted and diminutive, while the feet are large and animal-like. The figures appear to be perched on a mound of gold coins. The large figure depicted is laughing horrifically, the face some five times larger than the form of the terrified couple. This figure is crippled, and walks with a crutch. The body is shortened, like that of a spina bifida victim, yet endowed by Boyd with a frightening power. So a cripple armed with paint-brushes, that are "mightier than the sword" seems to hold the ultimate "word", through paint. This grotesque and perverse triumphalism for art possessed of moral and philosophical implication, over purely physical considerations such as lust, greed and materialistic commerce is absolute. And the world so presented appears too far gone to be reprieved through the insight of the victimised artist, the enlightened sufferer. Boyd indicates that the image of the cage also relates to his fellow artist Noel Counihan, an outspoken exponent of free speech, who, in order not to be jailed for his public protest, padlocked himself in a cage on the back of a truck on Sydney Road in Melbourne in 193?.[8] Boyd was not overtly political like Counihan (a life-long member of the Communist Party) but respected Counihan and shared left-wing sympathies, "I put myself in the cage, like Noel, but instead of talking I had my paint brushes".[9]

In the painting *Figure Watching* (1973) **(9.6)**, there recurs again the theme of lovers exposed, their privacy destroyed by voyeurism. Boyd identifies closely with this theme, in a highly charged manner. The couple as such are repeatedly depicted as

inhabitants of another world, completely in thrall one to the other, yet wholly vulnerable to a wider context. The war years experienced by Boyd forced the invasion of love and intimacy, denying all privacy for courting couples; young lovers sought clandestine meetings. An air of desperation surrounds Boyd's urgently copulating couples, now portray ed as the guilty victims of a society in the grip of war.

The figure who watches refers to the angel spying on Adam and Eve, in depictions of the Old Testament story, done by Boyd in the 1940s. But in this painting is larger, more patriarchal. There is however a blandness in his demeanour, leaving the viewer of the painting, in this instance at least to experience also the futility of such voyeurism. The painting *Figure with Rainbow and Rain* (1973), reveals reminiscences of a number of Boyd's *Nebuchadnezzar* paintings. But instead of the power-crazed King, the artist is portrayed as perhaps a misguided seer in the face of the natural elements. Elements of Nature, in this instance driving rain which almost envelops the figure, are used as a metaphor for chaos and anarchism by Boyd, in opposition to some divine order. Little of the divine order exists here, although the fact that trees still stand, and a beautiful and unexpected rainbow appears may be viewed as a beacon of hope. Paintbrushes held firmly in the hand, crouching desperately and with the handicap of a muzzled dog on his back, Boyd portrays himself as a woeful image, the artist battling against all odds in a world bent on self-destruction and mercenary exploitation.

The painting *Levitating Figure on Fire, Money, Nude* (1973) **(9.8)**, is one of the most disturbing and grotesquely searing images in the whole series of such works of the early 1970s. Both conceptually and stylistically it relates to the *Nebuchadnezzar* series as well as to the subsequent *Mars* series. Here too Boyd confronts another obsessive theme established within his existing *oeuvre*, expressing feelings of repugnance, by means of an expressionistic style. The canvas is smeared with paint by hand (as with infantile excrement) the canvas is severely attacked with

rapidly applied brush strokes built up to compose a truly hideous sight of violence and betrayal.[10] Here humans are betrayed to animals, nations betray the environment, and all is betrayed to the future. The physical pain experienced by the levitating figure, and the piercingly destructive meeting of the eyes of the nude and the animals is represented with such intensity by Boyd that the whole work leaves one feeling physically tense, emotionally disturbed.

Boyd himself interprets these paintings in a number of different ways reinforcing the idea that there is no single interpretation, rather a fluid range of interpretations in a process linking together thought and motive.

> They're mostly about the painter, about painting the landscape, and exclusively an Australian landscape. Some of the [elements] that I've used in other pictures [They represent] that stage of coming to a dead end or at least thinking you've come to a dead end and needing to rekindle the painting . . . I mean you get utterly disgusted with the work you've done.[11]

The profoundly disturbing *Caged Painter* series was developed by Arthur Boyd to include images of vivisection. **(9.4,9.9,9.11)** Arthur and Yvonne Boyd were invited by a doctor acquaintance to visit the Maudsley Hospital where he worked. He had published a book entitled *The Pleasure Principle*, the Boyds were shocked when they were shown rabbits in cages who had a drug administered to them which Boyd recalls made them nod their heads like toys. [12] Both Arthur and Yvonne Boyd left the hospital seriously distressed by the treatment of animals in the name of medicine. The scientific manipulation of animals by humans was repulsive to Boyd and he used his memory of their hospital experience to create searing images of cruelty. The imagery is complex and references are made to a number of previous paintings by Boyd. For instance, of *Woman Injecting a Rabbit*, he says:

> In this one with a woman injecting a rabbit, she's locked in this wire mesh hospital and she's naked and she's on her back as a painter.

> There's a ram dressed up holding the brushes. This is to do with making money. On the window sill in a couple of the St. Francis pictures, the money is left. In this picture I've put the money, which is the reward for being a painter who is sitting on the back, or squatting on the shoulders of the woman injectingthe rabbit.[13]

This woman injectingthe rabbit signifies for Arthur Boyd, personal monetary gain at the expense of suffering. The animal, as victim, can be seen in a broader and more universal context now, than this precise imageperhaps had intended.

In 1971 Arthur Boyd returned to Australia to take up the position of Creative Arts Fellow at the Australian National University in Canberra. During his stay he was invited by art dealer Frank McDonald to visit his property, Bundanon, on the south coast near Nowra. Boyd recalls his first trip there:

> We drove down from Canberra. It was an endless drive off the main road and we at last arrived very late. We stayed and it was absolutely searingly hot. I went painting down by the river and it was so hot that the paint ran into the sand. The first work was a very rudimentary sketch which is now at the National Gallery. **(9.10)** After we had been here I thought the place was absolutely marvellous. When we were leavingI asked Frank McDonald if he ever came across another part of the river, or in the area, anything like Bundanon, would he let us know.[14]

Soon after the Boyds returned to London they received a letter from McDonald to say that the property next to Bundanon, Riversdale, also on the ShoalhavenRiver, was for sale. The Boyds wasted no time in seizing the chance and bought Riversdale from photographs. They then made arrangements for the house to be extended and renovated. When the Boyds returned to Australia in October 1974, they lived at the neighbouringproperty, Earie Park, while the work on Riversdale was completed. The Shoalhaven increasingly became the most important source for Boyd's painting. When Frank McDonald had to sell Bundanon in 1979, Arthur Boyd

bought it. By this stage the Shoalhaven area had already become the source of inspiration for all of his work — for example, the copper paintings exhibited at the Australian Galleries in Melbourne in 1976, the *Narcissus* lithographs and etchings 1976-77, and the *Narcissus and Shoalhaven* paintings **(9.7-9.21)** exhibited in London at Fischer Fine Art in 1977.

In Bundanon, Boyd responded to a sense that those who had settled there initially did not have merely a transitory attitude to their life in Australia.

> It certainly didn't have an English atmosphere. But it had the atmosphere of an Englishman who had decided that he would get the best out of the Australian landscape . . . They thought that they were adding a whole new dimension to a previously so-called untamed landscape. With Bundanon you get this small farming area turning in a horse-shoe shape with the river winding around for nine kilometres or more. The small farming area in the middle is surrounded by virgin bush. The settlers did their best with the knowledge they had and it's turned out, I think, to be a marvellous example of a kind of colonialism, the ideal that the English had . . . What appealed to me about this combination is that it fulfilled a desire to transport an English vision. It also preserved the original concept of a wild Australia or an Australia that was still untamed.[15]

Boyd holds a deep respect for the Aboriginal culture and way of life and a sympathy for their plight within white society, expressed with the powerful images of his *Bride* series in the 1950s. It would be a mistake however, Boyd believes, to relinquish our own European ways and to attempt to live the ways the Aborigines have traditionally. Underlying messages in Boyd's landscape paintings allude to the destruction of the natural environment by European civilisation in contrast to the harmonious relationship and respect for the land held by the Aborigines who lived here for 40,000 years or more.

By 1971, Arthur Boyd had lived in England for twelve years and he began to miss Australia. He was keen to rediscover his roots and in the Shoalhaven area he found great stimulus. It was vastly different from the Victoria landscape around Port

Phillip Bay that he had painted as a young man:

> The scale of everything was so different: the scale of the Shoalhaven was enormous, compared to the softness and gentleness of Port Phillip Bay, especially around the Rosebud area, and also the harshness of the light... not so much the harshness but the clarity. At times it was so intense the shadows became almost black. They weren't blue as they would be in Port Phillip Bay.[16]

Bundanon had a dramatic quality and a grandeur, making the contrast between the natural unspoiled wilderness of Australia and the tame extended garden of England more marked. At Bundanon Boyd perceives that a balance has actually been achieved, on a small scale between the grand wilderness and a cultivated experience and that is worth maintainingas an example. He is alarmedby the lack of planning and the lack of care taken in Australia:

> I think Australians have been apt to believe that because this was such a vast land, they couldn't make a mark on it. But a mark has been made and if it continues at this rate, it will soon be too late . . . The whole of the South Coast and the Woolongongarea needs pollution control. You can see the great yellow smog that hangs over the whole valley and it blows up over the Kangaroo Valley and it sits there until a very strong wind blows it down and then the whole process starts again. I'm a landscape painter among other things and I don't want to see the whole area looking like the area of northern New South Wales, around the University of New England (Armidale) where there are thousands and thousands of acres of dead trees.[17]

> At Bundanon, Boyd also responded to the 'scale of things':

> The scale of the house and of the land, the form of the river, the bank of rock over the river: those things seemed to be right. The house is not very big . . . it's just big enough to suit the particular cleared farming area that you see. It's like looking at a marvellously proportioned picture on a wall, that is in scale with its surroundings. Quite apart from the marvellous things like the change of seasons and the marvellous birds . . . There is always something . . . the days are so

> different, the clouds, the brilliance of the blues and pinks. Sometimes the light on Pulpit Rock is so orange, very beautiful and strong.[18]

The first experience of the Shoalhaven area by white settlers was in 1797 when survivors of the Sydney Cove and Cumberland shipwrecks passed through the area. In 1811 when Governor Macquarie was forced by poor weather to shelter in Jervis Bay, he gave instructions for the region to be explored. However, John Oxley, soon to become Surveyor-General of New South Wales, claimed in 1819, "It can never be a settlement of any consequence".[19] Undeterred by Oxley's view, the Scot, Alexander Berry, formed a partnership with Edward Wollstonecraft and took up 10,000 acres of swampy land to the north of the Shoalhaven River. The land needed to be drained, which Berry did, using convict labour. A cottage and a house were subsequently built. Once the initial opening up of the area had taken place other settlers came. In 1837 Richard Browne took up Bundanon at the bend of the Shoalhaven but sold it four years later to Dr. Kenneth MacKenzie. MacKenzie built the stone house at Bundanon in 1866.

Throughout its history the Shoalhaven has been favoured by artists. Conrad Martens visited Alexander Berry's property in 1839. Samuel Elyard, an amateur watercolourist, painted prolifically in the 1850s and 1860s. Other artists include the minor artist Louis Frank in the 1880s and A.H. Fulwood in the 1890s. William Lister Lister, Elioth Gruner, Roy de Maistre and Lloyd Rees[20] worked there at different times, and most recently Brett Whiteley, Tim Storrier, John Olsen and Joel Elenberg. In 1977 the owners of Bundanon made a submission to the New South Wales Government recommending the establishment of a regional gallery in the Shoalhaven area. Daniel Thomas, then Curator of Australian Art at the Australian National Gallery in Canberra, stated:

> Few other landscapes in Australia have been honoured by so large a body of painting on the highest level of artistic achievement and of

intellectual and emotional involvement.[21]

The earliest work by Arthur Boyd at Bundanon was the first of numerous sketches in oil paint that he made. The first exhibition of works by Boyd inspired by Bundanon, however, were not the oil sketches but small oil paintings on copper. The technique was not unlike miniature painting in its approach. It was used in the seventeenth century, often in pot or plate shapes, but also in panels. Boyd explains his technique:

> It is not painted directly on to the copper. The copper is brilliantly cleaned and buffed and washed down with methylated spirits. An oil base is painted on to the copper and smoothed out with a fine brush, about an inch-wide sable brush. It must be very glass-like. Then I work on it with oil paint and stand oil. Stand oil is a treated linseed oil. It is heated but not boiled. Its main property is that it does not move or run. The stand oil played a big part in these pictures because some of them are very detailed.[22]

An unlikely and original technique for an artist in the 1970s, oil on copper was the very opposite of heavy impasto paint used widely by Boyd in work such as the *Nebuchadnezzar* series. The paintings each took weeks to produce and indeed Boyd suffered 'tennis elbow' as a result of holding the brush across the painting to achieve maximum control for the minute detail. Most of the copper paintings were executed in England from detailed sketches done *in situ.* The copper paintings have an intimate quality in contrast to the large scale of the landscape itself, yet it enables one to experience the variety of the landscape in the way that one acquaints oneself with prints or drawings in a book. The quality of paint on metal gives a jewel-like illusion. It was the tremendous sharpness and clarity of light on the Shoalhaven as opposed to the more southerly Australian landscape of his early painting that made oil on copper suitable as a medium:

> The little copper pictures lent themselves to painting the area. I mean they're very small and very detailed. You can see looking into them the bank of the river. You can see every little twig standing out as sharp as a knife whereas you wouldn't see that on Port Phillip Bay. I think that's what the early Heidelberg painters saw when they painted around Melbourne where everything was fuzzy or much more atmospheric.[23]

Besides the obvious differences, there is an approach to picture-making in the copper paintings that is reminiscent of the reverence for the craft of painting and for the subject-matter itself, of paintings such as *The Boat Builders at Eden* **(4.21)** and *The Mining Town* (or *Casting the Money-Lenders out of the Temple*) **(4.9)**. In both groups of paintings the craft of picture-making and the approach to the subject are of supreme importance. In both there is also great respect paid to the Old Masters. In relation to the copper paintings Boyd refers to the jewel-like quality in Vermeer's painting, "one of the greatest of all painters . . . a pearl necklace, tiny dots to highlight objects — superbly painted, a timelessness".[24]

The "flat, ordered conception of space" of the copper paintings stands in contrast to Boyd's previous landscape work. As a previous commentator observed:

> Bush scenes painted in the Shoalhaven region seem meticulously 'real' compared with earlier bush scenes in Boyd's *oeuvre*; it was the relatively untouched nature of the area that had attracted the artist to it. The portrayal of its riverbanks no longer romanticises the bush but neither are the paintings literal transcripts of a given spot . . . The subjectivity of the expressionist trend has given way to a new classicism.[25]

Boyd worked on the copper paintings for between twelve and eighteen months. If they are all put together they make only a picture about five feet by six feet. In *Riverbank* and *Rock Cleft* (1974), the palette is high-key and very similar to Tom Roberts' *Bailed Up*, a painting that Boyd much admired. The diamond-shape

came partly from Roberts but also from observation.

> When you look into the river you see the dried-up entrances of a creek that fed the river through the rocks. It's a fairly common formation. Roberts made it so marvellously symmetrical . . . I would have been reminded by the Roberts.[26]

Boyd painted approximately thirty works on copper. They were "astonishing in their detail, tonal qualities and truth to nature".[27] He recorded different parts of the Shoalhaven River and the different effects of time and season on the landscape. Most of the copper paintings were divided into three planes, sometimes four. *Rockface and Small Waterfall* (1975) **(9.12)**, divided into the sky, the thick forested area and the sand and the water. It was painted some distance down the Shoalhaven, on the Bundanon side, reached by boat:

> I painted this between Bundanon and Riversdale after heavy rain when you get little rivulets which disappear later. The copper painting has intensely detailed areas where I am treating the landscape as if I am only three feet away. At the same time I'm putting in the whole scene — you could make 100 paintings out of this.[28]

Broken Cliff Face and Moon (1974-76), is a lighter painting than most of the copper works and painted very early in the morning near Riversdale. The ground of titanium, zinc and chalk lends itself to the pink translucent effect, also created in *Pink Sky and Water* (1974-76) **(see also 9.13)**. Conscious of the physical phenomena that are exclusive to the Shoalhaven River, Boyd observes:

> At Riversdale you constantly see the moon. It rises dramatically over the river. Unlike England, in Australia the stars and the moon bear down on you. It's something that your attention is constantly drawn to.[29]

In *Woman and the Waterfall* (1974-76) **(see also 9.15)**, Boyd does not use the division of three or four planes as in most of the copper works. It is one of the few

where there is a human presence; the woman refers to Boyd's earlier works of *Susannah and the Elders.* In the main part Boyd is concerned with recording the landscape in the copper paintings and in this he looks to two earlier painters of the Australian landscape:

> To deal with this landscape in a faithful way you have to start with Von Guerard and Buvelot. If you are concerned with putting down the landscape in the same way as the novelist is concerned with putting down aspects of life, you are limited, unless you become completely surreal. And then you get completely into the realm of the imagination which becomes so hard to deal with that it has to be an intellectual rather than a visual exercise.[30]

Although the copper paintings were not all done *in situ* they were serious perceptual works. Boyd was able, through the long and detailed work to gain tremendous insight into, and knowledge of, the Shoalhaven area. Indeed a parallel can be made between the period of 'research' that the copper paintings represent and the period as a young artist in Melbourne where, due to the shortage of materials brought about by the war, Boyd was unable to paint and instead drew prolifically. The vast plethora of images gathered and recorded during the war sustained him for years and became, as Grazia Gunn points out, his "persistent images".[31] The copper paintings enabled Boyd to recall accurately the visual and metaphorical qualities that could be conveyed in the dramatic and infinitely expressive Shoalhaven landscape. The landscapes in the copper paintings are what Boyd describes as "straight landscapes": they do not rely on a text. He does not use images from the Bible (for example, *Nebuchadnezzar*) or from classical myths (*Narcissus* or *Mars*). They were to come later. To a large extent the copper paintings are a celebration of nature and represent a pensive pause before the dramas unfold — when the Shoalhaven becomes the stage for Boyd's images of humanity's future, for uncertainty, isolation and vulnerability.

Boyd's work on copper was in contrast to the pessimistic 'caged painter' works produced during the period spent in Canberra in 1972. *Figure (Artist) in a Cave*

with a Smoking Book (1972-73) **(9.17)** endorses the views expressed later, in 1977, in an interview with the poet Peter Porter when he referred grimly to the future, "of the environment overwhelmed by technology". He described artists and writers as being "in the unnecessary business of entertainment". [32] Such views colour a great deal of Boyd's work in the 1970s although the work with political undertones runs parallel to what Boyd himself describes as "straight landscapes",[33] a celebration of the beauty in the landscape in the Shoalhaven. The work done in the landscape there, enabled Boyd to put to one side the self-doubt that had coloured his work for some time. He was attracted to the multitude of moods and possibilities there: from the tranquillity reminiscent of Sydney Long's nymphs in *Spirit of the Plain* that inspired his *Narcissus* paintings and etchings; to the drama in Nature — the floods, storms and ensuing destruction which Boyd used to create images of imminent disaster of a universal kind. In 1978, shortly before the work on Riversdale was completed (May) there was a tremendous rainfall:

> I remember this terrible, incessant rain . . . When the river is in flood it groans and moans in a muted way and great chunks of debris come down. There are dead cattle, and on one occasion a complete house swept by.[34]

Many of Boyd's paintings at this point (and well into the 1980s) reflect the great physical presence of Nature — both the inspiring beauty but also the destructive qualities. Boyd uses the skulls of animals to signify destruction; juxtaposed onto the rich landscape they make poignant statements about the fragility of life. Boyd recalls incidents that prompted him to weave events with observation from nature and his own symbolism. For example, *Flood Receding in Winter Evening* (1981) **(8.10)**:

> During the flood a valuable stud bull, marooned on a high patch of ground, was forced to swim by means of a helicopter; it made the crossing but perished from panic soon afterwards. In the grotesque carcass floating past Boyd laments the destruction of a noble work of nature by modern technology.[35]

Flame Trees, Horses's Skull, Black River (1983) **(8.12)** is one of a series of haunting works with a story behind it:

> A horse called Flame had been with the family for years. One day, they found the horse trapped in the paddock with barbed wire wrapped around his hind leg. The wire was stuck in the ground due to the flood. The horse died. The family buried him under one of the flame trees in the paddock where it had been found.[36]

The images of death recall Peter Fuller's observation that the paintings of Arthur Boyd were very pessimistic but that they possessed the quality of redemption through form. Boyd recalls:

> After I was told the story of the horse I unearthed the skull from under the tree and put it in my studio. The coral trees were in bloom and I suppose the two ideas came together — the flowering tree and the dead horse. I put in the barbed wire because it was the cause of the horse's death and it is also a reminder of the country and its cruelty.[37]

Each period of time spent by Boyd on the Shoalhaven in the seventies strengthened his love for it as a source for his work. During these initial years Boyd combined the physical drama of the Shoalhaven with literary and classical sources. *Rose, Burning Book* and *Aeroplane* (1976), an early symbolic work, pre-empts the *Mars* series. **(8.18)** The burning book signifies the destructive effect of war:

> By making arms and bombs you destroy the very thing that is instructive and creative. It is the opposite of creative endeavour of any kind. The rose is the English rose that is trying to take root but it has floated off like a Scotch thistle where the fluff goes everywhere . . . The rose is in the shape of a bomb, over the Shoalhaven. Civilisation is going up in smoke.[38]

In a number of collaborative projects with poet Peter Porter, Boyd make illustrations in book form which later informed and inspired paintings. The first was based on a Biblical text, the story of Jonah, published in 1973. The *Lady and the*

Unicorn was published in 1975. *Narcissus* in 1984 and *Mars* in 1988. He also made illustrations for Pushkin's *Fairytales* which was published in 1978 **(9.23)**. Increasingly the landscape became Boyd's stage; for example, his *Narcissus* work prompted him to explore more secluded areas. A *Pond for Narcissus with Lilly Pilly Trees* (1978) **(9.18)** is in contrast to the very open, stark landscape, of the previous years. Mysterious images are introduced expanding Boyd's repertoire to a great extent.

The seventies are a difficult period to summarise as so many themes and sets of work were produced that are both related to one another and also quite autonomous. The 'straight landscapes' reach fruition in the 1980s with a most prolific expression — scores of paintings produced during each visit. The myth and symbolism that enter Boyd's work soon after the first perceptual works, reveal themselves in complex and subtle personal dramas in the 1980s. Further, the work of the eighties is enriched by references to his own work of the 1940s and also by art-historical reference, for example, Cézanne's *Bathers*. It is in turn superimposed onto the Shoalhaven landscape with a confidence only possible in the light of intensive exploration and experimentation. The paintings produced in the late 1980s are a consummate achievement of international significance.

Arthur Boyd bought Riversdale in 1973 while resident in London. In the same year he exhibited recent paintings at Fischer Fine Art in London. In October 1974 the Boyds returned to Australia; 1975 was also spent between England and Australia. Boyd's work is rich with the imagery of his two worlds. Art-historical references have interested Boyd from an early age and so too classical mythology continued to fascinate him and strengthen his imagery. In 1978 Boyd spent a whole year in Australia, during which time the BBC film *Man of Two Worlds* was made. In the following year Frank McDonald put Bundanon on the market. He had failed to interest the New South Wales State Government in establishing a regional gallery/museum at Bundanon. Although the Boyds were happy with Riversdale, they

could not resist buying the beautiful homestead and surrounding land since it had been their first introduction to the Shoalhaven area.[39]

The *Narcissus* series comprises the largest body of work on a single theme executed by Boyd in his Shoalhaven period.[40] The first exhibition of the *Narcissus* works was held at Fischer Fine Art, London, with an introduction by Peter Porter who had visited Boyd's home, Riversdale in 1975:

> I have used several themes to allegorise (the Shoalhaven landscape). One of them was *Narcissus* . . . The stillness of the river and the echoes in the valley originally triggered the idea. Echo was in love with Narcissus but he only looked at himself and she faded away. The self-absorption of Narcissus particularly interests me. It is totally non-productive — you only perpetuate your own being. Even the seed falls barrenly into the water. [41]

In *Interior with Open Door, Shoalhaven* (1976) **(9.19)**, Boyd combines a straight landscape on the left of the canvas with the inward, introspective Narcissus on a canvas inside the studio. The continual dialogue between the internal feelings and ideas of the artist and the outside world — the source of inspiration are here given expression. The cleft in the riverbank, reminiscent of Tom Roberts' painting, is Boyd's other half; the debt to classical mythology is acknowledged in the studio image. Narcissus' punishment for scorning Echo with off-hand responses was for him to become increasingly fascinated with himself. He became so absorbed with his reflection that he fell into the water and drowned.[42] He turned into a flower — the Narcissus which grows at the edge of ponds. Boyd responded to the image of falling as he did to floating figures in his lovers paintings and etchings in the sixties. *Figure Falling, Shoalhaven* (1976) **(see also 9.20)**, creates an image of hopeless decline and impotence, a powerful questioning on a personal level, "to justify or question the artist's calling".[43] The suite of etchings produced on the theme of Narcissus was exhibited at the Westpac Gallery in Melbourne in 1985. They were subsequently

published with Porter's text. The Introduction, *Rage of Revolution*, is powerful and dramatic: monstrous wild beasts and a dismembered figure swirl upon the etching plate, creating a dramatic graphic image. Boyd's exploitation of the aquatint and etching process created rich velvety surfaces with the figures illuminated and full of energy. The entire series is a brilliant example of Boyd's visionary approach. There is great diversity of images from the powerful *VII Narcissus Laments Orpheus*, **(7.33)** to the sinister *V The Painters' Banquet* **(7.31)** and the poetic delicacy of *III The Orchid on the Rock.* **(7.30)** Boyd often refers to the attraction of the Shoalhaven area lying in the immense diversity of physical phenomena. Here in the *Narcissus* etchings he gives back to the viewer infinite interpretations both in terms of ideas and in formal terms.

Boyd produced a very large suite of drawings for Peter Porter's *Mars* poems. He creates a set of haunting images of war that are reminiscent in emotional tone to the work he produced in the 1940s in response to the horror of the Second World War. The Mars drawings are, however, a more esoteric and enigmatic series than the forties paintings.

> Boyd has combined the iconographies of the classical gods and of the World War I digger to create a set of harsh and confronting images of war. Sexuality plays an important part too. In the traditional interpretation of the myth, the conjunction of Mars and Venus — of the male principle of opposition and the female principle of attraction — resulted in harmony. But here, on the contrary, sexuality only seems to exacerbate the vertigo of destruction. War is not something we endure: it is something we desire, and that is its real horror.[44]

References to the *Mars* poems can be found in many of Boyd's works, one of the finest being *Hanging Rocks with Mars* (1985) **(9.22)**. Closely related in thematic terms to the *Mars* series is Boyd's painting *Princess of the Shoalhaven* (1978) **(9.23)**. Following the commissioned lithographs to illustrate Pushkin's *Fairytales*, Boyd identified with the image presaging disaster in the story of *The Princess of Shamakhan*:

> The Shoalhaven region is made to stand for the 'Kingdom of the East' where the beautiful but treacherous princess of Shamakhan steps from a tent 'shimmering with beauty like the dawn' to entrance the hapless king, the leading figure in the story of *The Golden Cockerel* the princess . . . is but an apparition which will cause the king's death.[45]

The natural beauty of the Shoalhaven area caused Boyd to marvel constantly. His paintings of *Four Times of Day, Pulpit Rock* (1982) **(9.25-9.28)**, are a celebration of the grandeur and wonder of Nature. Implied in Boyd's celebration is the message that unless environmental issues are acknowledged and steps are taken to preserve the wilderness, it will all be destroyed.

> I'd like to feel that through my work there is a possibility of making a contribution to a social progression or enlightenment. It would be nice if the creative effort or impulse was connected with a conscious contribution to society, a sort of duty or service. I think you have to be able to make something which does involve concepts and ideas.[46]

Boyd's painting has altered our perceptions of the landscape in Australia profoundly and his original interpretation of European literature and painting has enriched the way we see. There is a generosity of spirit in Boyd the individual and in the work he created. The sheer volume is prompted by a mind that will not stop inventing images and by an individual intent on communicating issues of great urgency, regarding the future, to as many people as he can reach. Boyd's energy can be seen in the remarkable output of work on the Shoalhaven theme. His initial works were sketches in oil, followed by the painstakingly detailed works on copper. He continued to interpret and illustrate *Jonah*, Pushkin's *Fairytales* and *Narcissus* and *Mars*, and in these years during his visits to Australia, he explored the Shoalhaven on foot and by boat. His knowledge and appreciation of the area grew to the point where in 1982 in the *Bundanon* series **(9.29-9.32)**, the real world is subordinated to the world of the imagination. He produced a staggering ninety-six works in three months. The energy

of the works is achieved by the physical involvement: using his hands instead of brushes Boyd's presence in the landscape is tactile and active; and also by the intensity of colour — in large part mixed by the artist in a converted potters' grinding machine from pure pigment, oil and beeswax. The intense colour has a powerful effect on the eye and brings Boyd's messages of life. The *Four Times of Day, Pulpit Rock* (1982) **(9.25-9.28)**, were all done by hand:

> All the marks are finger marks. You are able to get a great variation in the foliage, keeping it fairly broad, but it is almost like a watercolour. But it has a kind of crispness that sometimes isn't achieved with brushes — they get in the way.[47]

Boyd points out that Bundanon lends itself to an impressionistic approach to painting:

> The changes are great and occur during a day to an enormous extent. Changes in seasons as well. The flame trees and the jacaranda trees and poplars in full leaf. It is a vastly different landscape in the Spring and Summer to this time of year.[48]

Boyd's paintings of *Four Times of Day* capture the delicate colours, the swirls, the softness, the great drama that happens in each day:

> It all comes out of the landscape itself. It's not made up. It might be played on.[49]

They capture the detail and richness and the visual accidents in nature. It is to Boyd's credit that a single landscape can inspire such diversity of work. He gives us the impression that in life there are infinite possibilities, as long as we train ourselves to see:

> Landscape is like a Mozart symphony or even an opera. It can

> sometimes be like a Wagner . . . put on Rheingold and you've been through the whole landscape . . . I just think this landscape is so beautiful and so inspiring that I think you could go on ringing the changes forever.[50]

The freer, more painterly work of the 1980s is in contrast to the copper paintings and to the careful approach of his early symbolic paintings in the 1970s. *Pulpit Rock* is of central importance in Boyd's work. In *Four Times of Day* one cannot help comparing Boyd's approach with that of Cézanne at Mont Saint-Victoire or Monet's *Haystacks and Cathedrals.* There is a religious affinity in Boyd's repeated use of Pulpit Rock:

> I'm sure I'm religious in a sense that I am overawed by the marvellous things in the world and overawed by the awful things in the world.[51]

Ursula Hoff observes:

> Subtle changes of position and emphatic contrasts of colour weld *Four Times of Day* into one continuous movement of rise and fall. In these paintings of Pulpit Rock set between sky and water in an ambience of luminous space, Boyd restates the theme of the cyclic element in nature that had occupied him in the forties.[52]

The *Four Times of Day* series are profoundly melancholic images yet exquisitely beautiful. There is no sign of human involvement in the landscape, no powerlines, bridges or people. They are at once representations of the dark side of human nature and also of an untouched wilderness where the imagination can have full rein.

In a similar vein to *Four Times of Day*, Boyd accepted a large commission in 1985 for the State Theatre in Melbourne. They were produced in an original and interesting manner: the canvases (mostly 5x4 feet) were placed side by side on the garden path between the kitchen at Bundanon and the studio. In this way the artist achieved a sense of continuity between the works in the series. He then went along

with a stick of charcoal attached to an extension pole and drew the contours, looking along the landscape and forming a long picture. The canvases were not hung in the order in which they were painted but whichever way they looked best. The paint was mixed in large plastic tubs or buckets. They were a mixture of the artist's own hand-made paints (from ground pigments) and commercial paint of high quality. The works were painted quickly and by hand — they capture a moment and are filled with Arthur Boyd's original energetic vision.

In the works that followed, Boyd juxtaposed human dramas onto the Shoalhaven landscape. Pulpit Rock rises in the background and the river plains with flame trees create a stage for Boyd, echoing the works of the 1940s which use the beach at Albert Park as their stage. The shadow of death is in the wings as Boyd parades human folly and yet as the viewer, one feels uplifted nonetheless.

In November 1992 Arthur and Yvonne Boyd returned to Australia after an absence of almost seven years. It was by then over ten years since Boyd had attempted to bequeath the Shoalhaven River property in southern New South Wales, including its National Trust buildings and some two thousand works of art, comprising the Boyd family art collection, to the people of Australia. Boyd admitted with hindsight that he was naïve in thinking that making the gift would be a straightforward business.[53]

Distrust and suspicion met the offer at many levels: What was Boyd really on about? What was in it for him? For some in the federal bureaucracy, the project was just too difficult and too complex not to be regarded with suspicion. The idea of the Shoalhaven gift surfaced regularly at State and then Federal Government levels for many years, but always, the tax implications, the administrative complexities and the sheer significance of the gift itself appeared to overwhelm the power brokers and sink Boyd's vision beneath a raft of problem-finding.

Only three people — long-time lawyer for Arthur Boyd, Bill Lasica; former

arts adviser David Chalker; and former Federal Arts Minister Clyde Holding — refused to abandon Boyd's vision to create a sanctuary for artists, writers, performers and musicians, a place of peace and respite for the whole Australian public. It was a gesture at once grand in its intentions whilst remaininghumbly democratic.

The men worked together for more than a decade, cajoling public servants, wooing Government officials, negotiating tax pitfalls and writing one of the most complex and difficult trust deeds in Australian art history. [54]

In October 1992 Boyd wrote a six page handwritten letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Paul Keating. It was hand-delivered by Mr. Clyde Holding and Mr. Keating responded immediately, joining Lasica, Chalker and Holding in their campaign. By Australia Day, January 26 1993, the Prime Minister was able to announce that the Bundanon Gift had been officially accepted.

The Boyds spent 1993 at Bundanon. It was an exceptionally busy year with government and media activity regarding the Bundanon Trust, as well as preparations for a major Retrospective Exhibition of Boyd's work at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, scheduled for that December. On a practical level conditions were not ideal for painting: although he felt a desperate need to work, the constant interruptions made by interviewers, visitors, officials and friends prevented Boyd from doing so for several months. Furthermore, the sudden death of his brother-in-law and close friend Sir Sidney Nolan in October 1992, made a normal studio routine virtually impossible during the first few months after their return. True to form, however, with an exhibition scheduled to open at the Australian Galleries in Sydney in December, Boyd set to work on a new series of work. Rich in imagery, the paintings are typical of the great variety in Boyd's work. Classical figures such as Orpheus, and Biblical references (the crucifixion) are imposed on Boyd's beloved Shoalhaven River. *Pulpit Rock* and *Black Cockatoos* (1993) displays Boyd's endless quest to define mood and form in landscape. Boyd again uses Pulpit Rock in *Peter's Fish and Crucifixion*

(1993). Prompted by the sight of fresh fish caught in the river, Boyd made an association with the notion of Christ's Apostles, the fishers of men. Religious significance is given to everyday phenomena by echoing the shape of Pulpit Rock with white cloud, thus emphasising the way it reaches towards infinite space, the heavens. The crucifixion on the river bank is used by Boyd in previous works, for example *Crucifixion and Rose* (1979-80) and signifies vulnerability and suffering as well as alluding to the fact that the European Culture and Christianity are in relative terms new in the ancient land of Australia.

Evening Star (1993) explores the important relationship which Aboriginal culture has with the land. In the *Bride* paintings (1957-59) Boyd responded to the abhorrent state in which Aborigines lived, witnessed during his first journey to Central Australia at that time:

> They are the victims of broken rituals on whom Boyd has bestowed a ritualised search for identity. They wander in a world of uncanny signs and enigmatic confrontations pictorially eloquent, which nevertheless protect them from too much understanding.[55]

Boyd uses elements from Aboriginal dreamtime myths alongside characters from classical mythology. The "power to mythologise all things" is central to all of Boyd's painting. Orpheus, who sang and charmed animals represents good and evil in human nature, guilt and retribution, and the individual's relation to an underworld. In Boyd's scheme, Orpheus is an Aboriginal and elements of the dreamtime myth of the Kuppapoingo tribe from the Crocodile Island region of the Northern Territory are used. The rainbow serpent swallows young men and spews them up again into adulthood as part of the circumcision ceremony. In 1973 Robert Melville observed that Boyd had in a sense himself been swallowed by the rainbow serpent for he was:

> born in the land which had once been entirely metaphor, a land where for many thousands of years all things — birds, marsupials, anthills,

gum trees, waterholes and whatever else teemed in its seeming emptiness — were celebrated in myth and perceived as spiritual presences.[56]

NOTES CHAPTER EIGHT:

1 Tom Rosenthal interview with Janet McKenzie, London, December 1997.

2 Rosenthal commissioned and edited the following books on Boyd(all in London):
At Thames & Hudson — Franz Philipp, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, 1967.
T.S.R. Boase, *St. Francis of Assisi*, 1968.
T.S.R. Boase, *Nebuchadnezzar*, 1972.
At Secker and Warburg — Arthur Boyd and Peter Porter, *Jonah*, 1973.
The Lady and the Unicorn, 1975.
Narcissus, 1984.
Mars, 1988.
At André Deutsch — Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, 1986.

3 Tom Rosenthal interview with Janet McKenzie, London, December 1997.

4 *Ibid.*

5 James Strachey (ed.) , *The Complete Works*, Trans. Anna Freud by Sigmund Freud, Hogarth Press, London, 1974.

6 Tom Rosenthal interview with Janet McKenzie, London, December 1997.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan, Artist and Revolutionary* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 91-95; *Sun*, Melbourne, 20 May, 1993.

9 Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Canberra, 1993.

10 Sigmund Freud, "Dreams in Folklore" in Vol. XII (1911-13),*The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, pp. 199-200.

"For a man who can no longer copulate . . . there still remains the pleasure of shitting . . . defaecation-dreamscan thus also be impotence-dreams . . . The difference between the interpretions is not so pronounced as might appear at first sight. The defaecation-dreams too, in which the victim is a woman, deal with impotence — relative impotence, at least, towards the particular person who no longer has any attraction for the dreamer. A defaecation-dream thus becomes the

dream of a man who can no longer satisfy a woman, as well as of a man whom a woman no longer satisfies."

This perhaps relates to feelings of Arthur Boyd's father (absorbed by Arthur Boyd) after the chosen celibacy with his wife for "medical" reasons. See Chapter Five, discussion of the *Nude* paintings of the 1960s.

[11] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet Mckenzie, Canberra, 1993.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, July 1993.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] Sandra McGrath, *The Artist and the River*, Bay Books, Sydney, 1982, p. 10.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[22] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Ursula Hoff, "Introduction", Fischer Fine Art, London, 1986.

[26] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[27] Sandra McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 116.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 130.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 120.

[31] Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*

[32] Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd, op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

[33] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[34] Sandra McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[35] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74.

[36] Sandra McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

[38] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[39] Sandra McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[42] "Introduction", *Narcissus A New Suite of Etchings by Arthur Boyd* Westpac Gallery, Melbourne, 5-17 March, 1985.

[43] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[44] Elwyn Lynn, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June, 1988.

[45] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[46] Grazia Gunn, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[47] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon , July 1993.

[48] *Ibid.*

[49] *Ibid.*

[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Canberra, July 1993.

[52] Ursula Hoff, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[53] Arthur Boyd interview with Janet McKenzie, Bundanon, July 1993.

[54] Virginia Trioli, "A Long and Winding Road In Boyd we trust". *The Age*, Melbourne, Saturday 28 August, 1993, p. 4.

[55] Robert Melville, "Introduction", *Arthur Boyd: Recent Paintings* May-June, 1973, p. 7.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

CHAPTER NINE

Allegory and Myth

To consider Boyd as other than a late twentieth century master of painting would be to fly against established consensus both within and outside Australia.[1] Boyd has been a leader in other respects: his free appropriation of figurative and compositional iconography from the Old Masters had enriched his subject material for fifty years. His innovative and largely self-taught techniques in various media have enabled him to develop his work in a highly original manner, as did others, such as Marc Chagall and Francis Bacon. Furthermore, his two deliberate collaborations with T.S.R. Boase and the poet Peter Porter, gave him the narrative basis for prolonged and profound forays into the varied nature of historic subject matter drawn from religious and classical legend. Thus Boyd has built up a remarkable range of source material, verified at key moments (such as *The Bride* series) by personal exploration and immediate and direct awareness of the human predicament. The role of landscape in his work over the same period too, has been tempered as a means whereby his key figurative elements, can be offset against the state of nature and an ambivalent environment, sometimes benign, yet haunted, often representative of mood, foreboding or lyrical. Accordingly, like all great masters, Boyd becomes hard to categorise:

> Essentially, he remains preoccupied with the land and the relationship to the land of humanity. This is exemplified in his work by figurative images of creatures, both human and animal, inhabiting the landscape. Boyd is not, however, a Postmodernist although . . . he works within a creative context now rendered more accessible by Postmodernist concepts. His references and quotations from the Old Masters are 'entirely different from those of the Postmodernists, not only because they are generally transformed into his own style but, more importantly, because they continue to serve the dramatic and humanitarian purposes of his art.' This sets Boyd apart from the random selectivity of Postmodern figurative and expressionist work. Boyd is more appropriately considered, then, as a 'late-modern'

> painter, who has reached the point in his career where he can engage with the Old Masters on equal terms.[2]

Behind this obsessive enquiry and description of humanity at bay, lies a commitment redolent with Freudian overtones, even driven by neurosis. The use of allegory and myth refers Boyd to the broad European history of ideas but this is no preconceived, consciously styled creative figure, seeking acclaim as genius, but rather an intensely inquisitive, often obsessive talent that must find expression for the incompleteness, irregularity or desperation of the world recognised by humanity. If allegory is definable as continued metaphor,[3] and distanced at the beginning from its source, it,

> will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory.[4]

In Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (1964) Angus Fletcher writes "that allegory seems by its nature to be incompletable, never quite fulfilling its grand design".[5] The link here between the formal affinity of allegory and the obsessive art approach by Arthur Boyd as such,

> derives precisely from such a search for lost origins, epitomized in the consequences of the primal scene, which answers the child's question of where he came from with a diacritical solution which he cannot accept, and which his neurosis thereupon represses and denies. But this would in turn suggest the affinity of psychoanalysis not only with obsessionality, but also with allegory.[6]

If allegory is derived from the failure of enlightenment, then Boyd is justifiably pessimistic in his late work as in his early period. Here is no Postmodernist, or even now late Modernist, at work.

CONCLUSION:

Arthur Boyd died in 1999, his reputation secure in Australia and in the wider world. By any criteria there he stands apart as an artist of remarkable achievement and some complexity. He said himself that he was 'a spectator and a non-participant' during the debate on art that was pursued during the national reappraisal, in his state capital of Melbourne in the crisis years of the Second World War, and this firmly established his individual position in relation to other artists there and contemporary art movements of the time. This was in no way a negative stance however, and at certain points in the long development of his career and reputation, he was to make careful comments that provided secure and consistently clear evidence of the views he maintained on art itself, and his own position as artist in relation to the mainstream of activity in the field. Initially, for example, when the fuller implications of the wartime European Holocaust became known, Boyd considered that his private imagery, developed from childhood and familial experience, would no more suffice so that he must develop a language that could have a more universal relevance and appeal. Subsequently then his work took on a completely new characteristic as when he explored the work of the Northern European tradition, (Bosch, Breughel, Rembrandt), and moved on to revisit the text and narrative of the Old Testament.

When in the early 1970's, Boyd experienced a major crisis in his work, and painted the important and extensive series of Caged Painter works, he was clearly resolute about the full implications of this watershed in his development. To Peter Porter at the time, in a recorded interview, he was to express the view that he thought artists were "in the unnecessary business of entertainment". Such complex paintings give evidence of the artist's views on his own career, albeit at a point of self-examination. They have assisted in my definition of the artist's own contribution to the art of his time, and of his own positioning of himself within the art-historical tradition.

As my own research over several years of this study, initially under the guidance of Professor Bernard Smith, and subsequently under Professor Martin

Kemp, has gradually come to reveal, Arthur Boyd's *oeuvre* is both structurally complex and also escapes categorisation purely in art historical terms on account of the elusive and apparently enigmatic manipulation of content matter and narrative, frequently infused with autobiographical elements. For instance, the personal, psychological trauma of the artist's experience, resonant with anguish was so profound that he consciously obscured the meaning of the image, hence its specific readability, both then and for posterity. This contradictory nature could be transparently self-effacing both in private and in public, and yet he demonstrated a canny ability in the structuring of a significant career path. Thus in his lifetime he donated several thousand works to the National Gallery of Australia: paintings representing each period, tapestries, sculptures, ceramic tiles, prints complete with original plates, and numerous folios of drawings. As his work proliferated, and appreciated, he was able partly to subsidise until 1990, (when this ceased) several publications on his own work to consolidate a reputation already established in the art-critical forum both in Australia and in London.

Such determination to secure and preserve his *oeuvre* enabled Boyd's posterity to be secure. It also has caused my own work, while it initially appeared to be greatly facilitated by the full organisation of research material this process allowed, to develop a more investigative agenda and method in assessing Boyd's true quality, as reinforced by the essential guidance privacy and independence of the academic process here followed. The very propriety of the institutions concerned with Boyd's work, as well as the protocols increasingly governing its dissemination, obliged me to pursue always the real, inner meaning of Boyd's work of any period, rather than the conventional interpretations by now paramount. The literature on Boyd has been fully examined in the section Literature and Method forming part of the Introduction here. I have recognised the generally high standard of scholarship evident in such critique, yet I am ultimately forced to qualify this considered opinion through my own studies carried out in depth.

In developing this approach I was able to rationalise in turn a number of the inconsistencies in the conventional critique of Boyd's work. So I made a full and thorough analysis of those parts of Boyd's *oeuvre* which had in such an accumulative context been effectively eliminated from documentation and commentary, whether by omission or on the basis of assured, and growing conventional wisdom. From this analysis, both of the work, and its sources, within albeit the laboratory of the artist's own research, and most relevant to this, through the processes of drawing and printmaking (etching and lithography), I was able more fully to comprehend the significanceand meaningof the late allegoricalworks and in turn reconcile these within the artist's *oeuvre* to the early Biblicalpaintings.

This deep survey evidently eluded several distinguished commentators, in the years following the initial monograph (1966), and up to and including the last compendium (1986). By 1990, the Englishart critic Peter Fuller had drawn perceptive observations on Boyd, following several visits to Australia and having himself interviewed the artist at length. Fuller himself championed through the 1980's the return of figurative art, (in contrast to contemporary abstraction and non-objective art). In Boyd's *oeuvre* Fuller recognisedan artist who before all other counts belonged firmly within the European narrative tradition in painting, that had spanned five centuries. To illustrate his own views, Fuller chose to study againthe work of John Ruskin; and the paintings of William Holman Hunt with special reference to Boyd. Following discussions over the period with Fuller, Boyd himself then produced a most important work, entitled *The Australian Scapegoat,* with direct reference to Holman Hunt's famous allegoricalpainting, *The Scapegoat* (1854). Fuller had been in the process of situating Arthur Boyd at this time, within an international art-historical context at a climactericpoint in the artist's life. I had two leading discussions with Fuller before his untimely death in April 1990 in a car accident.

Fuller had, at the time of his death in April 1990, made the first positive attempt by any historian, writer or critic firmly to re-locate Arthur Boyd within the longer perspective of nineteenth and twentieth century painting. This fresh

assessment had been based firmly upon figurative and allegorical precedent. Given Fuller's interest in John Ruskin, it was natural that he should find Boyd a logical successor within a British tradition that encompassed William Dyce and William Holman Hunt, proponents of a redemptive art. Boyd for his part was ready to acknowledge this position, in painting the relevant 'Australian Scapegoat'. Yet while my conversations with Fuller had re-opened again the question of 'where Boyd stands', in a more prescient way they had drawn my attention to the extent to which Boyd deployed 'mediaeval space'. Fuller liked to quote the playwright Brian O'Shaughnessy, in his reference to Boyd's mediaeval space, 'a conception of space like that revealed in medieval towns and buildings and paintings', 'organic', that 'unfolds like a story',[7] instead of offering a vista. Fuller referred frequently to Boyd's early painting, *The Expulsion* (1946-47), where Adam and Eve must leave the Garden of Eden (1947-48), into the Australian bush. While Fuller had recognised in Boyd's work the vindication of figuration, for me it is imperative to assess the artist's position, as such, but within the modem world of his contemporaries.

My conclusion here has been that Boyd remains like others of his epoch, a modernist, enmeshed within a postmodernist cultural world which continues to consolidate an essentially twentieth century revision. In the closing decade of the past century, some commentators, since Fuller, have sought to locate Boyd with Chagall, or to claim Boyd as an important precursor of the 1980's postmodern Neo-Expressionist movement, which included such artists as Clemente, Cucchi, Chia, and Kiefer. However their logical precedent must be the Expressionist artists themselves, such as, Kandinsky, Franz Marc and Kokoschka, and with these Boyd cannot convincingly be re-aligned. Arthur Boyd in fact belongs to that extensive list of creative individuals in this century who by the very individualism of their art, and its greater cultural resonance cannot be readily grouped with the critique of their immediate period.

The late Millennium has reminded us of the deeper cultural roots of Western art and literature in terms of Judaeo-Christian tradition that spans even longer. Within

this longheld and long evolved tradition it is perhaps more satisfactory to equate Boyd in his time with other such great creative individuals as for example the poet/playwright Samuel Beckett or indeed the Russian film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky.[8] For in both such instances too, it was precisely that tradition, and the long shadow cast by its mediaeval imagery, and its deep primaeval mythologies (which still affect all of us) that drove these artists to pursue common themes of doom, redemption and salvation. Both Beckett and Tarkovsky had like Boyd endured a Christian upbringing with its preponderance of sacred texts. For Beckett, this characterises the play *Waiting for Godot*, and indeed his entire *oeuvre*. In Godot, specifically, it is the tree of life that symbolises hope and resurrection, not just crucifixion and death.[9] For Tarkovsky, the confrontation with life, of Andrey Rublyov in the film of the same, following a monastic upbringing, involved redemption through the rediscovery of faith, human love, and simply goodness, following great personal adversity.[10]

It is within the wider historical context of Western civilisation that I have found it possible, following these studies, to incorporate Boyd's individualism, and to see him wholly inter-related with a culture visual, musical, dramatic, and literary that possesses a deep intellectual resonance stretching back through the middle ages, even before the Enlightenment, well before the Renaissance. Although Boyd, Beckett, Tarkovsky as contemporaries appear at first to be disconnected masters in their separate fields, distinct from the collective thrust of modern movement, it is to that continuum, and this interval, that they both belong and owe their inspiration.

ENDNOTES CHAPTERNINE:

1 Robert Hughes, "Introduction: The Decline of the City of Mahagonny", *Nothing if not Critical, Selected Essays on Art and Artists*, Penguin Books, New York, 1992, p. 4.

> One can very well imagine an 'alternative history' of twentieth-century art with some Australian artists in it, Arthur Boyd, for instance, or Fred Williams.

Also p. 9: Hughes places Boyd in the top 8 middle generation world painters.

> The more hopeful, or less dismissive, could readily name twenty or so painters and sculptors of real merit who are at work today, some in Britain, some in Europe, some in New York: from senior figures such as Richard Diebenkorn, Robert Motherwell, Antoni Tapiès, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Arthur Boyd, Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon, through the middle generation (Ilya Kabakov in Moscow; Avigdor Arikha in Paris; sculptors Magdalena Abakanonowicz, Nancy Graves, William Tucker and Joel Shapiro; in England, Frank Auerbach, Howard Hodgkin and R.B. Kitaj), to such younger artists as Anselm Kiefer, Susan Rothenberg, Neil Jenney, Sean Scully, Elizabeth Murray, Martin Puryear, Tony Cragg and maybe one or two hopeful group events . . .

[2] Michael Spens (editor), Preface to "Arthur Boyd, Landscape and Tradition" by Felicity St. John Moore, *Studio International*, Vol. 199, p. 1015, 1986/1987, London, 1987, p. 18.

[3] Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire" (1980), reprinted in *October, The First Decade, 1976-1986*, editors: Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Joan Copjec. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987, p. 386.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 386.

[5] Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1964, pp. 174-80.

[6] Joel Fineman, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

[7] Brian O'Shaughnessy, quoted by Peter Fuller in *Theoria, Art and the Absence of Grace*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1988, p. 222. O'Shaughnessy, 'Introduction' *Arthur Boyd* catalogue, Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1962 pp. 18-19.

[8] Andre Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time. Reflections in Time, Reflections on the Cinema*, (Translated from the Russian by Kitty Hunter-Blair) The Bodley Head, London, 1986.

[9] Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett, The Last Modernist*, Flamingo, (Harper Collins), London, 1997, pp. 391-2

[10] Tarkovsky, *op.cit.*, pp. 78-80.

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THE ART OF ARTHUR BOYD
Volume II Plates

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PhD Submission History of Art
University of St Andrews.

LIST OF PLATES

Abbreviations:

AGNSW : Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.
NGA: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia.
NGV: National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.
AGSA: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.
FFA: Fischer Fine Art, London.
AB: Collection Arthur Boyd, at the time of his death in 1999.
YB: Collection Yvonne Boyd.

266 works illustrated, including 34 referential works.

PART I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Melbourne Burning, 1946-7,
oil, tempera on canvas,
90.2 x 100.5 cm,
signed l.r.,
Collection Robert Holmes à Court, Perth.

1.2 The Expulsion, 1947-8,
oil, tempera on composition board,
101.6 x 122 cm,
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1.3 Half-Caste Child, 1957,
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PART II
FAMILY BACKGROUND
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65.8 x 54.6 cm,
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2.2 Self-Portrait, 1935,
oil on canvas,
62.2 x 53.4 cm.
Dated, signed l.l.,
NGA.

2.3 My father, Merric Boyd's Pottery and Kiln, 1934,
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NGA.

2.4 Self-Portrait, 1934,
oil on canvas on board,
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dated, signed, l.l.,
NGA.

2.5 Self-Portrait with Blue Shirt, 1936,
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signed l.r.,
NGA.

2.6 The Jetty, Rosebud, 1934,
oil on sealed calico,
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dated, signed l.r.,
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2.7 Doris Boyd in Blue Hat, 1935,
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2.8 Rosebud Interior, 1936,
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2.9 View from Arthur's Seat, 1936,
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2.13 Rock Pools, Back Beach, Rye, 1939,
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2.15 Cape Schanck, 1939,
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2.17 Sheoak reflected in Tidal River, 1937,
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2.23 The Baths, South Melbourne, 1943,
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2.24 The Kite, (Crucifixion) 1943,
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2.25 Potter's Wife in Garden at Murrumbeena, 1964-7,
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2.26 Potter Drawing by the Sea, 1967-8,
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2.29 The Brown Room, 1943,
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2.31 Potter's House at Murrumbeena, 1964-7,
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2.32 The Brown Room, 1935,
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2.33 Potter Drawing a Brown Cow in the Suburbs, 1967-8,
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2.34 Potter - Artist's Father in Armchair with Pot and Bust, 1969,
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3.2 The Kite (Crucifixion) 1943,
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3.3 Figure with crutches, fallen figure, dog and figure on bench, 1942,
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3.4 A South Melbourne Woman exercising her Lame Dog, c.1941-3,
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3.5 The King (the Deluge), 1944,
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The Hammock, 1944,
oil on gauze on board,
63 x 75.4 cm,
dated, signed l.r.

The Orchard, 1943,
oil on cotton gauze on board,
63 x 75.4 cm,
dated, signed, l.r.

The Cemetery I, 1944,
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3.7 The Seasons, 1944,
oil on gauze on cardboard,
63.5 x 76 cm,
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3.8 The Gargoyles, 1944,
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4.2 The Mourners, 1945,
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4.3 Saul and David, c.1946,
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4.5 The Prodigal Son, 1946-47,
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4.6 The Golden Calf, 1946,
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4.7 Moses Throwing Down the Tablets of the Law, 1946,
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4.8 Moses Leading the People, 1947,
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4.9 The Mining Town (Casting the Money-Lenders from the Temple), 1946-47,
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4.10 Melbourne Burning, 1946-47,
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4.11 The Expulsion, 1947-48,
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4.12 Jacob's Dream, 1947,
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4.13 Angel Spying on Adam and Eve, 1947-48,
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4.14 The Lovers, 1944,
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4.15 Bowl, polychrome with Angel's Face, 1948,
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4.16 Icarus Fallen on a Field, 1951-52,
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4.17 Jonah Swallowed by the Whale, 1950,
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4.18 Temptation of St Anthony, 1950-51,
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4.19 Kiss of Judas, 1952-53,
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4.20 The Thirty Pieces of Silver, 1952-53,
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4.21 Boat-builders, Eden, 1948,
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4.22 Moby-Dick Hill, near Frankston, Victoria, 1949,
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4.23 The Drover, 1948,
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4.24 Burnt Wheat Stubble, 1950-1,
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4.25 Santa Gertrudis Bull, 1950-51,
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4.26 Portrait of Max Nicholson, 1946,
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4.27 Portrait of Jack Freeman, 1943,
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NGA.

4.28 Portrait of Brian O'Shaughnessy, 1946,
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NGA.

4.29 Portrait of Robert Lindsay, 1949,
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NGA.

4.30 Yvonne Boyd Sewing, 1945,
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4.31 Berwick Landscape, 1948,
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4.32 A'Beckett Road, Harkaway, 1949,
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4.33 Susannah, 1948-49,
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4.34 The Prodigal Son, 1948-49,
Mural painting, Dining Room,
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4.35 Half-Caste Wedding,, 1955,
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4.36 Bride Running Away, 1957,
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Private Collection.

4.37 Shearers Playing for a Bride, 1957,
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4.38 Mourning Bride II, 1957-58,
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signed l.l.,
Private Collection.

4.39 Half-Caste Child, 1957,
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150 x 177.5 cm,
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4.40 Phantom bride, 1958,
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4.41 Persecuted Lovers, 1957-58,
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signed l.r.,
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4.42 Bridegroom and Gargoyles, 1958,
oil, tempera on board,
137.2 x 182.9 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

4.43 Bridegroom going to his Wedding, 1958,
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122 x 140 cm,
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4.44 Frightened Bridegroom I, 1958,
oil, tempera on canvas,
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signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

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WORD AND IMAGE.

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5.1 Reflected Bride I, (Bride Reflected in a Creek), 1958,
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Private Collection.

5.2 Lovers by a Creek, 1960,
oil and tempera on board,
122 x 91.4 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

5.3 Bride Drinking from a Pool, 1960,
oil and tempera on board,
129.5 x 91.4 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

5.4 Girl Asleep in a Stream, 1960,
oil and tempera on board,
122 x 137 cm,
signed l.r.,
Savill Galleries, Sydney.

5.5 Lovers in a Landscape, 1961,
oil on composition board,
122 x 137 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

5.6 Nude, Black Dog and Tent by a Black Pool, 1961,
oil, tempera on composition board,
137 x 114.5 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

5.7 White Dog Under Branch, 1961,
charcoal,
85.5 x 126.5 cm,
NGA.

5.8 Nude with Beast II (Diana and Actaeon series), 1962,
oil, tempera on composition board,
182.5 x 160 cm,
signed l.r.,
NGA.

5.9 Nude with Beast III, 1962,
oil on composition board,
160 x 182.9 cm,
NGA.

5.10 Lovers with a Bluebird, 1962,
oil on composition board,
160 x 183 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

5.11 Figure in Landscape, (Nude Washing in Creek III), 1961,
oil, tempera on composition board,
160 x 183 cm,
signed l.r.,
AGNSW.

5.12 Figure Washing, 1961,
charcoal,
54.5 x 197 cm, (mounted),
NGA

5.13 Nude Floating over a Dark Pond II, 1962,
oil on board,
48 x 60 cm,
Arts Council of Great Britain.

5.14 Nude Over Pond, c.1962,
watercolour,
40 x 58.5 cm,
NGA

5.15 Lovers Suspended over a Dark Pond, 1966-69,
Oil on canvas,
109 x 114.3 cm,
Private Collection.

5.16 Two Ended Figure with Bouquet, 1962 -63,
ceramic painting,
51 x 55.9 cm,
Private Collection.

5.17Romeo and Juliet, polytych, 1963-64,
Side panel, ceramic painting,
54 x 59 cm,
NGV.

5.18Romeo and Juliet, polytych, 1963-64,
Centre panel, ceramic painting,
161 x 113 cm,
NGV.

EXPERIMENTATION:
GRAPHIC WORK

6.1 Nudes with Joined Feet, 1962-3,
drypoint,
12.7 x 15.2 cm,
NGA.

6.2 Kneeling Nude with Beast II, 1962-63,
etching and aquatint,
25.4 x 30.5 cm,
NGA.

6.3 Head in Cup with Crying Head, 1962,
etching and aquatint,
30.5 x 40.6 cm,
NGA.

6.4 Lovers with a Bluebird, 1962,
etching and aquatint,
29.8 x 34.9 cm,
NGA.

6.5 Entombment, 1962-63,
etching and aquatint,
30.5 x 35.5 cm,
NGA.

6.6 Susannah with an Elder and a Dog, 1968-69,
etching,
25.4 x 30.5,
NGA.

6.7 Serpenting Figure with Feathers and Insects, 1968-69,
drypoint and etching,
35.6 x 45.1 cm,
NGA.

6.8 Nebuchadnezzar on the Moon, 1968-69,
etching,
25.4 x 30.5 cm,
NGA.

6.9 Nebuchadnezzar with a Snail on his Back, 1968-69,
etching,
35.6 x 45.7 cm,
NGA.

6.10 Ram and Dog with House and Trees, 1968-69,
etching,
30.5 x 33 cm,
NGA.

6.11 Wrestling Figures (Electra), 1963,
etching and aquatint,
30.5 x 40.6 cm,
NGA.

6.12 Wrestling Figures (Electra), 1963,
etching and aquatint,
30.5 x 40.6 cm,
NGA.

6.13 Electra Ballet, Covent Garden, London, 1963,
Photograph, Victoria and albert Museum, London.

6.14 Double Figure with Shark-Head and Horns, (Electra), 1962,
etching and aquatint,
35.6 x 40.6 cm,
NGA.

6.15 Europa and the Bull, 1961-62,
charcoal,
132 x 127 cm,
NGA.

6.16 Lysistrata II, 1971,
oil on canvas,
300 x 443 cm,
signed l.r.,
AGNSW.

THE COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

7.1 St Francis Dreaming of a Hunchback, 1964-65,
pastel,
48.3 x 63.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.2 St Francis, 1963-64,
oil on canvas,
108.5 x 113 cm,
Private Collection.

7.3 St Francis Cleansing the Leper, 1964-65,
pastel,
48.3 x 63.5 cm,
Private Collection.

St Francis suite of 16 Lithographs, 1964-65,
Each 57 x 79.5 cm, paper, signed l.r.,
Printed by John Watson,
Ganymed Press, London.
Published by Australian Galleries, Melbourne
and The Hungry Horse Gallery, Sydney, 1966.

7.4 Plate II Dreaming of a Hunchback.

7.5 Plate I St Francis and the Revels of Assisi.

7.6 Plate III Kissing the Hand of the Leper.

7.7 Plate IV St Francis Beaten by his Father.

7.8 Plate V St Francis and Rufino Preached Naked in Assisi.

7.9 Plate VII St Francis Holding Clare's Hair.

7.10 Plate IX St Clare Showing her Shorn Hair.

7.11 Plate XI The Gift of the Lamb.

7.12 Plate XII The Wolf of Gubbio.

7.13 Plate XV Jacoba of Settesoli and the Dish of Mostaccioli.

7.14 St Francis Makes Brother Masseo Turn Round and Round, 1964-65,
pastel
48.3 x 63.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.15 Red Nebuchadnezzar Fallen in a Forest with Black Birds, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.16 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Tree, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.3 x 183 cm,
NGA.

7.17 Seated Nebuchadnezzar and Crying Lion, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.18 Daniel with Bound Arms and Nebuchadnezzar on Fire, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.19 Nebuchadnezzar Blind on a Starry Night, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
183.5 x 175.9 cm,
Private Collection.

7.20 Nebuchadnezzar Protecting his Gold, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
NGA.

7.21 Nebuchadnezzar Wailing in the Wilderness, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.22 Lion's Head on Fire and Nebuchadnezzar Eating Grass, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
175.9 x 183.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.23 Nebuchadnezzar being struck by Lightning in a
Rocky Landscape with Black Ram,1966-69,
oil on canvas,
109.6 x 114.7 cm,
Private Collection.

7.24 The Fiery Furnace, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
183.5 x 175.9 cm,
Private Collection.

7.25 Nebuchadnezzar Eating Grass in a Hilly
Landscape with Lamb's Head, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
183.5 x 175.9 cm,
Private Collection.

7.26 Nebuchadnezzar with Stoat, 1966-69,
oil on canvas,
109.6 x 175.9 cm,
Private Collection.

7.27 Jonah: God's briefing,
"It used to be a military state", 1972-73,
drawing, ink,
28.6 x 19.5 cm,
Private Collection.

7.28 Jonah Outside the City, 1976,
oil on canvas,
152.3 x 122 cm,
Collection Boyd estate.

Narcissus Series of 24 etchings. 1983-84.
Etching and aquatint,
Plate size 60.3 x 42.5 cm,
Editioned by Mati Basis, London, 1983.

7.29 Plate I Introduction, "Rage of revolution..."

7.30 Plate III The Orchid on the Rock.

7.31 Plate V The Painter's Banquet.

7.32 Plate VI Narcissus Among the Anthropologists.

7.33 Plate VII Narcissus Laments Orpheus.

7.34 Plate X Echo Answers.

7.35 Plate XIV The Narcissus Emblem.

7.36 Plate XXII Echo's Farewell.

The Lady and the Unicorn Suite of 24 Etchings, 1973-74.
Etching and Aquatint,
80 x 53.5 cm, papersize,
signed l.r., edition of 52.
Printed by Mati Basis, London.
Published by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, 1975.

7.37 Plate II The Unicorn and the Ark.

7.38 Plate VI Enter the Emperor.

7.39 Plate VII The Hunters Set Out to Trap the Unicorn.

7.40 Plate IX The Unicorn sees the Lady.

7.41 Plate XII The Lady Betrays the Unicorn.

7.42 Plate XVII Death of the Unicorn.

PART IV LANDSCAPE AND MEANING

THE UNDERLYING ROLE OF LANDSCAPE

8.1 Landscape with Grazing Sheep, 1937,
oil on gauze on composition board,
86.2 x 58.4 cm,
signed, dated, l.r.,
NGA.

8.2 Landscape, Bacchus Marsh, 1943,
oil on board,
62.4 x 74.6 cm,
Private Collection.

8.3 The Shepherd (The Stockman), 1944,
oil on canvas on composition board,
63.9 x 89.4 cm,
NGA.

8.4 Landscape, Grampians, 1950-51,
tempera on board,
89.2 x 122 cm,
NGV.

8.5 Grampians Waterfall, c.1950,
tempera, oil on composition board,
106 x 122.5 cm,
signed l.r.,
NGA.

8.6 The Hunter (Aboriginal Head on a Horse with a Soldier), 1959,
oil and tempera on board,
133 x 155 cm,
FFA.

8.7 Half-Caste Wedding, 1955,
oil, amylacetate on composition board,
120 x 160 cm,
signed l.l.,
Private Collection.

8.8 Persecuted Lovers, 1957-58,
oil and tempera on board,
137.1 x 183 cm,
AGSA.

8.9 Lovers with a Bluebird, 1962,
oil on board,
160 x 183 cm,
Private Collection.

8.10 Flood Receding in Winter Evening, 1981,
oil on canvas,
122 x 152.5 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

8.11 Horse's Skull, Blanket and Starry Night, 1981,
oil on canvas,
183 x 175 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

8.12 Flame Trees, Horse's Skull, Black River, 1983,
oil on canvas,
200 x 245.5 cm,
Private Collection.

8.13Bathers, Shoalhaven, Riverbank and Clouds, 1984-85,
oil on canvas,
274 x 457 cm,
Private Collection.

8.14Bathers and Pulpit Rock, 1984-85,
oil on canvas,
305 x 335 cm,
Private Collection.

8.15Bathers with Skate and Halley's Comet, 1985,
oil on canvas,
267 x 417 cm,
FFA.

8.16Paul Cézanne, Bathers, c.1879-80.

8.17Skull-Headed Creature over Black Creek, 1983,
oil on canvas,

52 x 122 cm,
FFA.

8.18Riverbank with bathers and Mars, 1985,
oil on canvas,
267 x 414 cm,
signed l.r.,
NGV.

8.19The Australian Scapegoat, 1987,
oil on canvas,
275 x 426.5 cm,
signed l.r.,
Arthur Boyd Estate.

8.20Detail from The Australian Scapegoat Triptych, 1988,
oil on canvas,
each panel 275 x 426.5 cm,
Monash University, Melbourne.

8.21Large Skate on Grey Background, 1979-80,
oil on canvas,
182.9 x 175 .2 cm,
signed l.r.,
Bundanon Trust.

8.22The Australian Scapegoat, 1990,
oil on canvas,
152.5 x 122 cm,
FFA.

8.23Potter's Wife Decorating a Pot, 1967-69,
oil on canvas,
114.3 x 109.3 cm,
Private Collection.

8.24Potter in an Armchair Painting a Pot, c.1967,
ink drawing,
51 x 63 cm,
NGA.

8.25Maquette for tapestry woven by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop
in conjunction with the Parliament House Authority,
Canberra, 1984-85.
oil on canvas,
244 x 618 cm,
Private Collection.

8.26The Magic Flute II, 1990,
oil on canvas,
183 x 175.5 cm,
FFA.

8.27Green Queen of the Night, 1990,
oil on canvas,
182.9 x 259 cm,
FFA.

8.28Black pool and Queen of the Night, 1990,
oil on canvas,
190.5 x 327.6 cm,
FFA.

8.29Shepherd by a Black Creek, 1984-85,
oil on canvas,
274 x 457 cm,
signed l.r.,
Holdsworth Galleries, Sydney.

LANDSCAPE TRANSFORMED THROUGH PAINTING

9.1 Chained figure and Bent Tree, 1972-73,
oil on canvas,
152.4 x 122 cm,
signed l.r.,
NGA.

9.2 Caged Figure with Dogs, 1973,
oil on canvas,
152 x 122 cm,
FFA.

9.3 Figures, Bent Tree and Yellow Sky, 1973,
oil on canvas,
114.3 x 109.2 cm,
FFA.

9.4 Crescent Moon and Muzzled Figure, 1973,
oil on canvas,
86.4 x 58.4 cm,
FFA.

9.5 Figures, Money and laughing Cripple, 1972-73,
oil on canvas,
152.5 x 122 cm,
signed l.l.,
NGA.

9.6 Figure Watching, 1973,
oil on canvas,
152.4 x 122 cm,
signed l.r.,
FFA.

9.7 Figure with Rainbow and Rain, and an Artist with Easel, 1972-73,
oil on cotton duck,
316.5 x 432 cm,
signed l.r.,
NGA.

9.8 Levitating Figure on Fire, Money, Nude, 1973
oil on canvas,
152.4 x 122 cm,
FFA.

9.9 Woman Injecting a Rabbit, 1973,
oil on canvas,
152.4 x 122 cm,
FFA.

9.10 Riverbank, 1972,
oil on canvas,
58.4 x 86.4 cm,
NGA.

9.11 Painting in the Studio, Figure
Supporting Back Legs (of Painter), 1972-73,
oil on canvas,
316 x 431 cm,
NGA.

9.12 Rockface and River and Small Waterfall, 1976,
oil on copper,
30.5 x 24 cm,
Collection Yvonne Boyd.

9.13 Australian Landscape with Pond, 1976,
oil on copper,
30.5 x 21.5 cm,
FFA.

9.14 Budgong Creek Rocks, 1978,
oil on board,
28 x 35 cm,
Arthur Boyd Estate.

9.15 Waterfall and Rockface at Shoalhaven Valley, 1975,
watercolour,
28.5 x 24 cm,
Collection: Yvonne Boyd.

9.16 Shoalhaven Riverbank and Rocks, 1978,
oil on canvas,
120 x 90 cm,
Private Collection.

9.17 Figure (artist) in a Cave with Smoking Book. 1972-73,
oil on canvas,
152.4 cm,
NGA.

9.18 A Pond for Narcissus with Lilly-Pilly Trees, 1978,
oil on hardboard,
29.5 x 20.5 cm,
Arthur Boyd Estate.

9.19 Interior with Open Door, Shoalhaven, 1976,
oil on canvas,
152 x 122 cm,
FFA.

9.20 Reflected Figure and Cave, 1976,
oil on canvas,
152.3 x 122 cm,
signed l.r.,
Private Collection.

9.21 Eyes Reflected (Narcissus), 1976,
oil on copper,
21.5 x 30.5 cm,
Private Collection.

9.22 Hanging Rocks with Mars, 1985,
oil on canvas,
205 x 335 cm,
FFA.

9.23 The Princess of the Shoalhaven, 1978,
oil on canvas,
152 x 122 cm,
Private Collection.

9.24 Colonial Poet Under Orange-Tree, 1979-80,
oil on canvas,
152.4 x 121.9 cm,
Private Collection.

Four Times of Day, 1982,
4 Panels.
oil on canvas, each 122 x 152 cm,
Arthur Boyd Estate.

9.25 Early Morning, before Sunrise, Pulpit Rock.
9.26 Morning, Pulpit Rock.
9.27 Midday, Pulpit Rock.
9.28 Evening, Pulpit Rock.

9.29 Reflected Rock and Riverbank, Winter, 1981,
oil on canvas,
152.2 x 122 cm,
Collection Joseph Brown, Melbourne.

9.30 Waterfall in the Shoalhaven Valley, 1982,
oil on canvas,
152.5 x 122 cm,
Private Collection.

9.31 Skier with Aboriginal Pointing, 1985,
oil on canvas,
183 x 160 cm,
FFA.

9.32 Storm Cloud with Black Swan, 1985,
oil on canvas,
183 x 160 cm,
Australian Galleries, Melbourne.

REMBRANDT (1606-1669),

10.19Self-Portrait, c.1661.

10.20A Woman Bathing in a Stream, 1655.

10.21David Playing the Harp before Saul.

10.22Susannah Surprised by the Elders, 1637.

TITIAN, (Active before 1511, died 1576),
10.23The Death of Actaeon.

VON GUERARD, Eugene, (1811-1901),
10.24Head of the Mitta Mitta, Eagle's View.

COUNIHAN, Noel (1913-1986),
10.25Aboriginal Mother and Child, 1960.

10.26Family, Swan Hill, 1960.

BERGNER, Yosl (1920-),
10.27Aborigines in Fitzroy, 1941.

DRYSDALE, Russell, (1912-1982),
10.28Two Heads of Lubras, 1961.

10.29Desert Landscape, c.1952.

BOYD, David, (1924-)
10.30Conflict, 1959.

10.31Truginini and the Sealer, 1959.

NOLAN, Sidney, (1917-1992),
10.32Musgrave Ranges, 1949.

10.33The Trial (Ned Kelly series), 1946-47.

10.34Burke and Wills Expedition, Gray Sick, 1949.

REFERENTIAL WORKS OF ART

10.1 **BLAKE, William**, The Stygian Lake. From illustrations to Dante's Divine Comedy. 1824-27.

10.2 **BOYD, Arthur Merric (1862-1922)**, Landscape, 1922.

10.3 **BOYD, Emma Minnie (1858-1936),** Interior with Figures, The Grange, 1875.

10.4 **BOYD, Penleigh (1890-1923)**, Winter Triumphant, 1920.

10.5 **BOYD, Merric (1888-1959),** Pot with Tree Trunks, 1912.

BREUGHEL, Pieter, (died 1569)

10.6 Big Fish Eats Little Fish, 1556.

10.7 The Gloomy Day, 1565.

10.8 The Land of Cockaigne, 1567.

10.9 The Cripples, 1568.

CHAGALL, Marc (1887-1985)

10.10I and the Village, 1911-1912.

10.11Over the Town, c.1924.

10.12Bouquet with Flying Lovers, 1934/1947.

10.13The Martyr, 1940.

10.14Blue Landscape, 1949.

10.15The Madonna of the Village, 1938-1944.

10.16The Lights of the Wedding, 1945.

BUVELOT, Abram Louis (1814-1888).
10.17Yarra Flats, 1871.

DI COSIMO, Piero, (c.1462-1515),
10.18A Mythological Subject, (The Death of Procris).

PART I: INTRODUCTION.

1.1 MELBOURNE BURNING, 1946-7.

1.2 THE EXPULSION, 1947-8

1.3 HALF -CASTE CHILD, 1957

PART II: AUSTRALIA: THE FIRST DECADES.

Family Background
Early Work

2.16 SELF-PORTRAIT IN RED SHIRT.1937

2.17 SHEOAK REFLECTED IN TIDAL RIVER. 1937

2.18 YELLOW AND BLACK HORSES WITH VIEW OF MELBOURNE, 1939

2.19 CHILD SITTING ON A BEACH, 1938

2.20 YELLOW HORSE IN A BLACK POND, 1938

2.21 RED HORSES AND TREES, 1940

2.22 HORSES AND BUILDING, 1939

2.23 THE BATHS, SOUTH MELBOURNE. 1943.

2.24 THE KITE. 1943.

2.25 POTTER'S WIFE IN GARDEN AT MURRUMBEENA, 1964-7.

2.26 POTTER DRAWING BY THE SEA, 1967-8.

2.27 PORTRAIT OF BARBARA HOCKEY, 1938-9

2.28 THREE HEADS (the brothers Karamazov), 1938.

2.29 THE BROWN ROOM, 1943.

2.30 OPEN HOUSE,MURRUMBEENA.
THE BROWN ROOM.
ARTHUR BOYD'S STUDIO, designed by cousin Robin Boyd.

2.33 POTTER DRAWING A BROWN COW IN THE SUBURBS, 1967-8.

2.34 POTTER - ARTIST'S FATHER IN ARMCHAIR WITH POT AND BUST, 1969.

The War Years

3.1 THE BATHS, SOUTH MELBOURNE, 1943.

3.2 THE KITE, 1943.

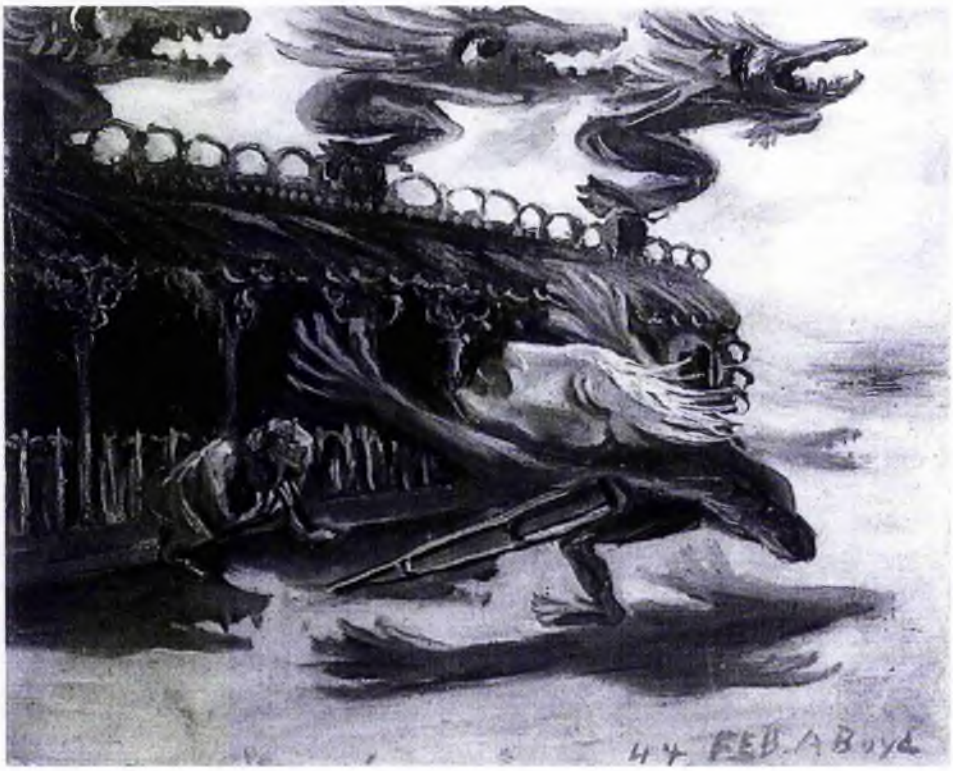
3.3 FIGURE WITH CRUTCHES, FALLEN FIGURE, DOG AND FIGURE ON BENCH,1942

3.4 A SOUTH MELBOURNE EXERCISING A LAME DOG, C.1941-3

3.5 THE KING, (THE DELUGE), 1944

3.6 THE SEASONS:
The Beach, 1944
The Hammock, 1944
The Orchard, 1943
The Cemetery I, 1944

3.7 THE SEASONS, 1944.



3.8 THE GARGOYLES, 1944

3.9 KITE FLYER, SOUTH MELBOURNE, 1943.

3.10 THE FOUNTAIN, 1943.

3.11 THE CEMETERY II. 1944

3.12 FIGURES BY A CREEK. 1944.

3.13 CRIPPLE IN SMOKE FROM FACTORY CHIMNEY, 1942

3.14 CORPSE, DOG AND HANSOM CAB IN AN INDUSTRIAL STREET, c1947

Post –War

4.1 THE MOCKERS, 1945

4.2 THE MOURNERS, 1945

4.3 SAUL AND DAVID, c.1946.

4.4 FIGURE STUDY 1948-9

4.5 THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON, 1946-7.

4.6 THE GOLDEN CALF, 1946

4.7 MOSES THROWING DOWN
THE TABLETS OF THE LAW, 1946

4.8 MOSES LEADING THE PEOPLE, 1947

4.9 THE MINING TOWN (CASTING THE MONEY LENDERS FROM THE TEMPLE), 1946-7

4.10 MELBOURNE BURNING, 1946-7

4.11 THE EXPULSION, 1947-8

4.12 JACOB'S DREAM, 1947

4.13 ANGEL SPYING ON ADAM AND EVE, 1947-8

4.14 THE LOVERS, 1944.

4.15 BOWL, polychrome with angel's face, 1948.

4.16 ICARUS FALLEN ON A FIELD, 1951-2.

4.17 JONAH SWALLOWED BY THE WHALE, 1950.

4.18 TEMPTATION OF ST. ANTHONY, 1950-1

4.19 THE KISS OF JUDAH. 1952-3.

4.20 THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER. 1952-3.

4.21 BOAT BUILDERS, EDEN, 1948

4.22 MOBY DICK HILL, NEAR FRANKSTON, VICTORIA, 1949

4.23 THE DROVER, 1948

4.24 BURNT WHEAT STUBBLE, 1950-1.

4.25 SANTA GERTRUDIS BULL, 1950-1

4.26 PORTRAIT OF MAX NICHOLSON, 1946

4.27 PORTRAIT OF JACK FREEMAN, 1943

4.28 PORTRAIT OF BRIAN O'SHAUGHNESSY, 1946

4.29 PORTRAIT OF ROBERT LINDSAY, 1949

4.30 YVONNE BOYD SEWING, 1945

4.31 BERWICK LANDSCAPE, 1948

4.32 A'BECKETT ROAD, HARKAWAY, 1949.

4.33 SUSANNAH, 1948-9.

4.34 THE PRODIGAL SON, 1948-9.

4.35 HALF - CASTE WEDDING. 1955

4.36 BRIDE RUNNING AWAY. 1957

4.37 SHEARERS PLAYING FOR A BRIDE. 1957

4.38 MOURNING BRIDE II. 1957-8

4.39 HALF -CASTE CHILD, 1957

4.40 PHANTOM BRIDE. 1958

4.41 PERSECUTED LOVERS, 1957-8

4.42 BRIDEGROOM AND GARGOYLES. 1958.

4.43 BRIDEGROOM GOING TO HIS WEDDING, 1958

4.44 FRIGHTENED BRIDEGROOM I, 1958.

PART III: EUROPEAN SOURCES: WORD AND IMAGE.

London: Art Historical, Literary.

5.1 REFLECTED BRIDE I
(BRIDE REFLECTED IN A CREEK),
1958

5.2 LOVERS BY A CREEK, 1960

5.3 BRIDE DRINKING FROM POOL, 1960

5.4 GIRL ASLEEP IN STREAM, 1960

5.5 LOVERS IN A LANDSCAPE, 1961

5.6 NUDE, BLACK DOG AND TENT BY A BLACK POOL, 1961

5.7 WHITE DOG UNDER BRANCH, 1961

5.8 NUDE WITH BEAST II.
(DIANA AND ACTAEON series), 1962

5.9 NUDE WITH BEAST III.
(DIANA AND ACTAEON I), 1962

5.10 LOVERS WITH A BLUEBIRD.1962.

5.11 FIGURE IN LANDSCAPE
(NUDE WASHING IN A CREEK III), 1961

5.12 FIGURE WASHING, 1961

5.13 NUDE FLOATING OVER A DARK POND II, 1962.

5.14 NUDE OVER POND, c.1962

5.15 LOVERS SUSPENDED OVER A DARK POND. 1966-9.

5.16 TWO-ENDED FIGURE WITH BOUQUET. 1962-3.

5.17 ROMEO AND JULIET, polytych, 1963-4.

5.18 ROMEO AND JULIET, polytych 1963-4.

Experimentation: Graphic Work

6.1 NUDES WITH JOINED FEET, 1962-3

6.2 KNEELING NUDE WITH BEAST II,1962-3

6.3 HEAD IN CUP WITH CRYING HEAD, 1962-3.

6.4 LOVERS WITH A BLUEBIRD, 1962-3

6.5 ENTOMBMENT, 1962-3

6.6 SUSANNAH WITH AN ELDER AND A DOG, 1962-3

6.7 SERPENTING FIGURE WITH FEATHERS AND INSECTS, 1968-9

6.8 NEBUCHADNEZZAR ON THE MOON, 1968-9

6.9 NEBUCHADNEZZAR WITH A SNAIL ON HIS BACK, 1968-9

6.10 RAM AND DOG WITH HOUSE AND TREES, 1968-9

6.11 **WRESTLING FIGURES (ELECTRA), 1962-3**

6.12 WHITE JOINED FIGURES
(used for Elektra backdrop) 1962.

6.13 Nadia Nerina and David Blair
in Robert Helpmann's ballet, ELEKTRA, 1963.

6.14 DOUBLE FIGURE WITH SHARK HEAD AND HORNS
(used for Elektra backdrop), 1962.

6.15 EUROPA AND THE BULL, 1961-2.

6.16 LYSISTRATA II, 1971.

The Collaborative Projects

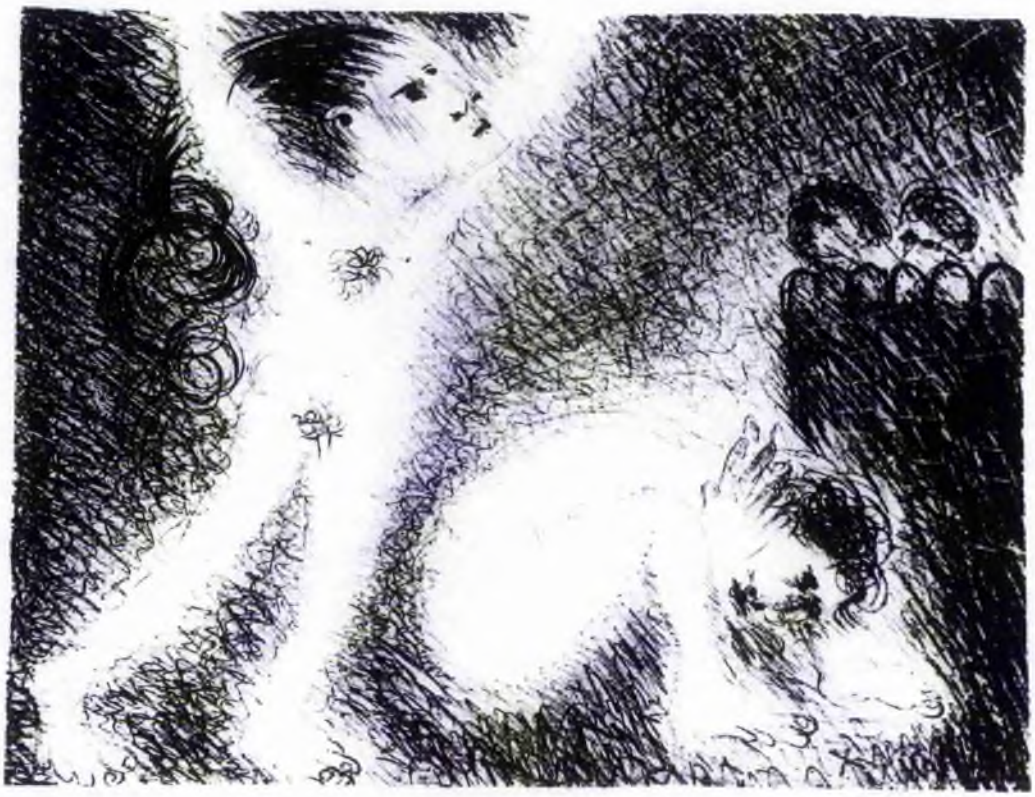
7.3 ST. FRANCIS CLEANSING THE LEPER. 1964-5.

7.4 PLATE II : DREAMING OF A HUNCHBACK

7.5 PLATE I: ST FRANCIS AND THE REVELS OF ASSISI

7.6 PLATE III: KISSING THE HAND OF THE LEPER

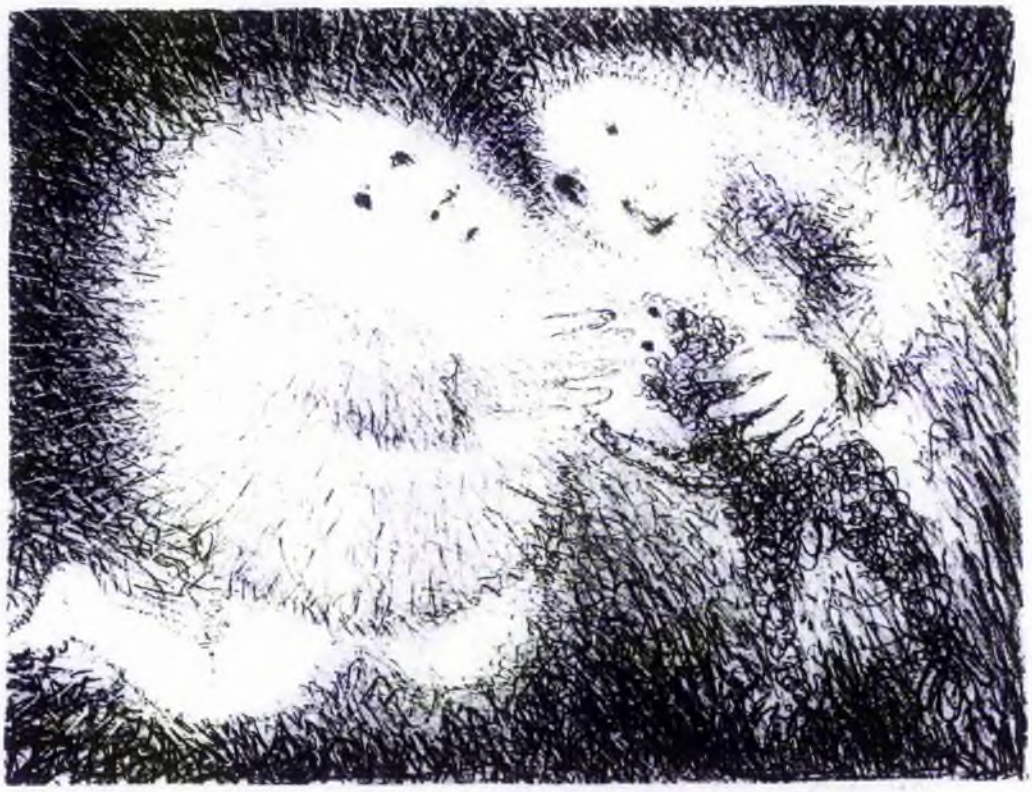
7.7 PLATE IV: ST FRANCIS BEATEN BY HIS FATHER



7.8 PLATE V: ST FRANCIS AND RUFINO PREACHED NAKED IN ASSISI

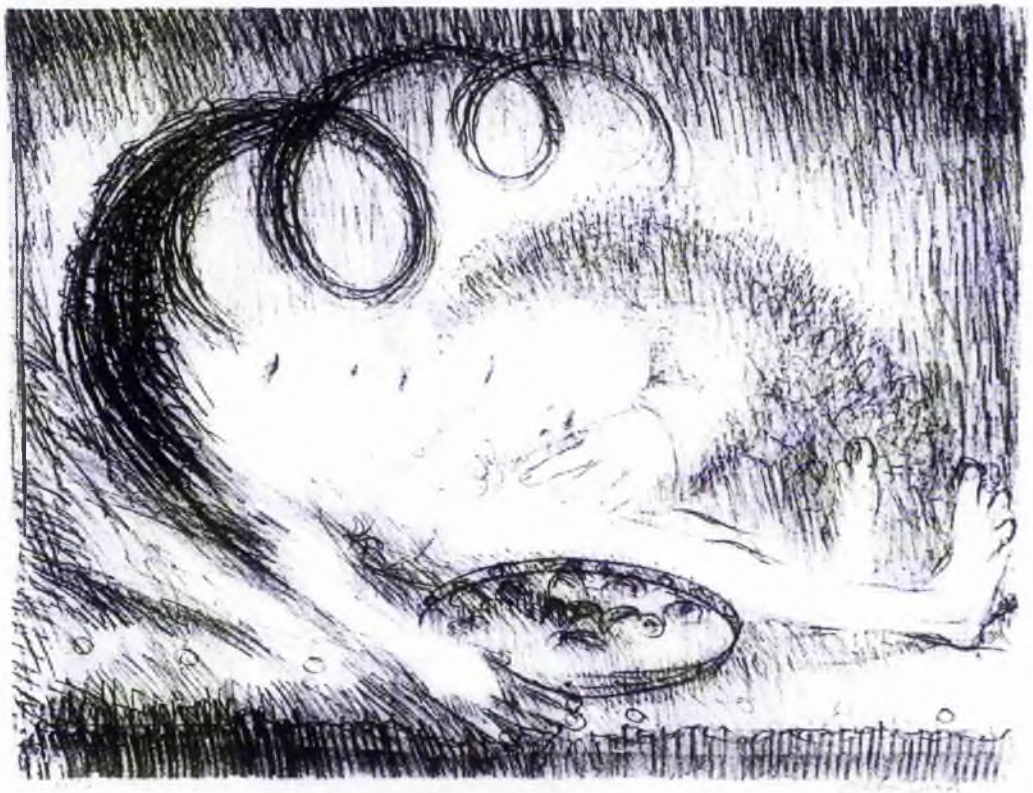
7.9 PLATE VII : ST FRANCIS HOLDING CLARE'S HAIR

7.10 PLATE IX : ST CLARE SHOWING HER SHORN HEAD



7.11 PLATE XI : THE GIFT OF THE LAMB

7.12 PLATE XII : THE WOLF OF GUBBIO



7.13 PLATE XV : JACOBA OF SETTESOLI AND THE DISH OF MOSTACCIOLI

7.14 ST. FRANCIS TURNING BROTHER MASSEO, 1964-5.

7.15 RED NEBUCHADNEZZAR FALLEN IN A FOREST WITH BLACK BIRDS ,1966-9.

7.16 NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM OF THE TREE. 1966-9.

7.17 SEATED NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND CRYING LION. 1966-9.

7.18 DANIEL WITH BOUND ARMS AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR ON FIRE. 1966-9.

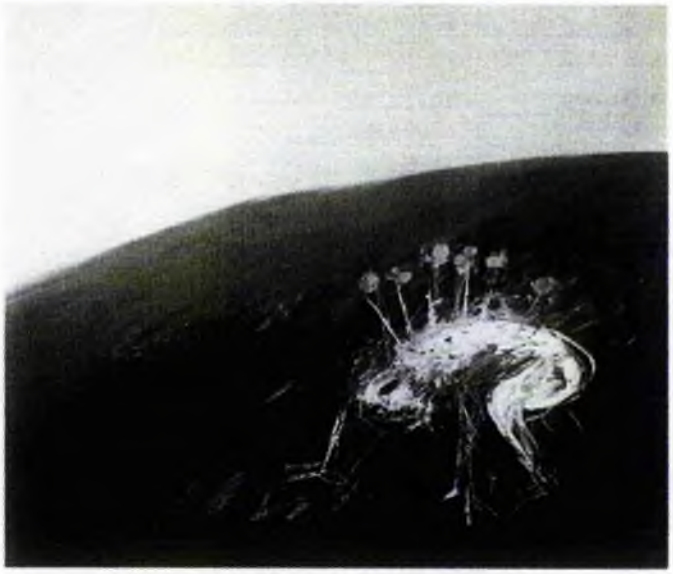
7.19 NEBUCHADNEZZAR BLIND ON A STARRY NIGHT. 1966-9.

7.20 NEBUCHADNEZZAR PROTECTING HIS GOLD. 1966-9.

7.21 NEBUCHADNEZZAR WAILING IN THE WILDERNESS, 1966-9

7.22 LION'S HEAD ON FIRE AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR EATING GRASS, 1966-9

7.23 NEBUCHADNEZZAR BEING STRUCK BY LIGHTNING IN A ROCKY LANDSCAPE WITH BLACK RAM, 1966-9



7.24 THE FIERY FURNACE, 1966-9

7.25 NEBUCHADNEZZAR EATING GRASS IN A HILLY LANDSCAPE WITH LAMB'S HEAD, 1966-9

7.26 NEBUCHADNEZZAR WITH STOAT, 1966-9

7.27 JONAH : GOD'S BRIEFING
- "It used to be a military state". 1972-3.

7.28 JONAH OUTSIDE THE CITY, 1976.

NARCISSUS
Series of 24 etchings, 1983-4

7.29 I INTRODUCTION, 'rage of revolution.....'

7.30 III THE ORCHID ON THE ROCK

7.31 V THE PAINTER'S BANQUET

7.32 VI NARCISSUS AMONG THE ANTHROPOLOGISTS

7.33 VII NARCISSUS LAMENTS ORPHEUS

7.34 X ECHO ANSWERS

7.35 XIV THE NARCISSUS EMBLEM

7.36 XXII ECHO'S FAREWELL

THE LADY AND THE UNICORN
Suite of 24 etchings, 1973-4

7.37 PLATE II: THE UNICORN AND THE ARK

7.38 PLATE VI : ENTER THE EMPEROR

7.39 PLATE VII :THE HUNTERS SET OUT TO TRAP THE UNICORN

7.40 PLATE IX : THE UNICORN SEES THE LADY

7.41 PLATE XII : THE LADY BETRAYS THE UNICORN

7.42 PLATE XVII : DEATH OF THE UNICORN

PART IV: LANDSCAPE AND MEANING.

The Underlying Role of Landscape

8.1 CHAINED FIGURE AND BENT TREE, 1972-3.

8.2 CAGED FIGURE WITH DOGS, 1973

8.3 FIGURES, BENT TREE AND YELLOW SKY, 1973

8.4 CRESCENT MOON AND MUZZLED FIGURE, 1973

8.5 FIGURES, MONEY AND LAUGHING CRIPPLE, 1972-3.

8.6 FIGURE WATCHING, 1973

8.7 FIGURE WITH RAINBOW AND RAIN, AND AN ARTIST WITH EASEL, 1972-3.

8.8 LEVITATING FIGURE ON FIRE, MONEY, NUDE, 1973

2.1 SELF -PORTRAIT, 1935

2.2 SELF -PORTRAIT, 1935

2.3 MY FATHER, MERRIC BOYD'S POTTERY AND KILN, 1934

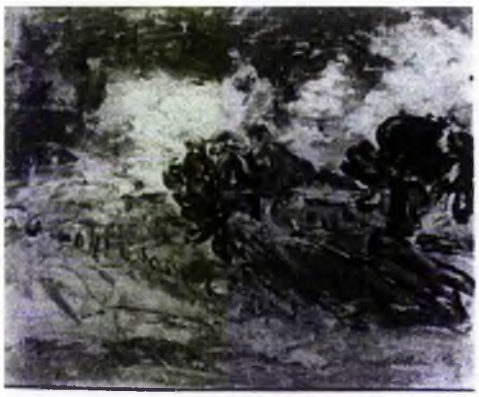
2.4 SELF - PORTRAIT, 1934

2.5 SELF - PORTRAIT WITH BLUE SHIRT, 1936

2.6 THE JETTY, ROSEBUD, 1934.

2.7 DORIS BOYD IN BLUE HAT, 1935

2.8 ROSEBUD INTERIOR, 1936.



2.9 VIEW FROM ARTHUR'S SEAT, 1936

2.10 LILYDALE, 1939

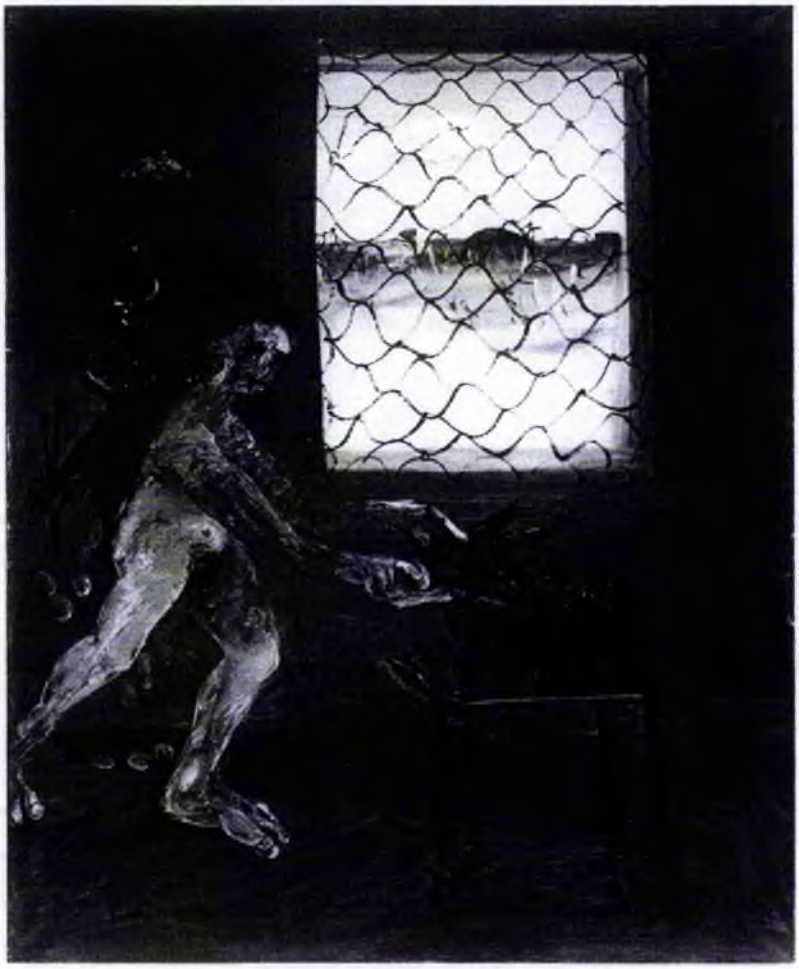
2.11 HOUSE ON A GREEN HILLSIDE, 1938

2.12 DROMANA BEACH WITH MOUNT ELIZA, 1939

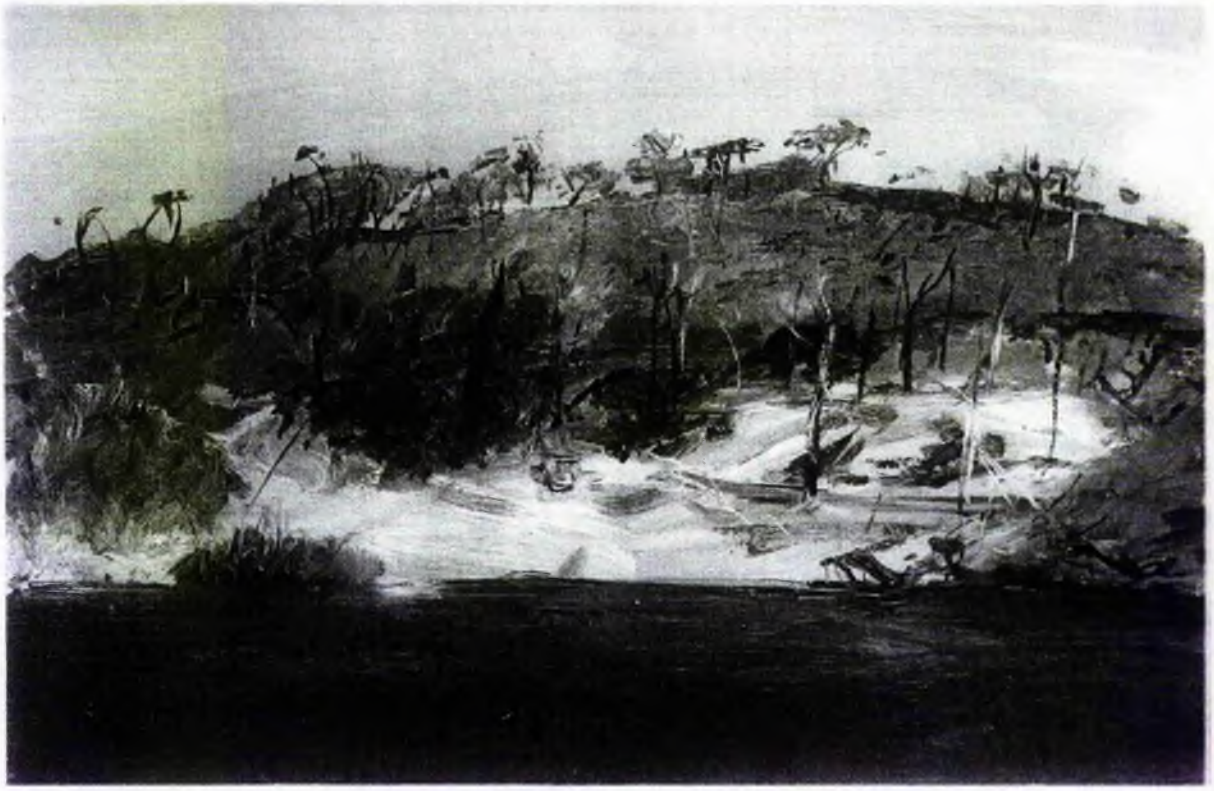
2.13 ROCK POOLS, BACK BEACH, RYE, 1938

2.14 SAND DUNES, BACK BEACH RYE, 1938-9

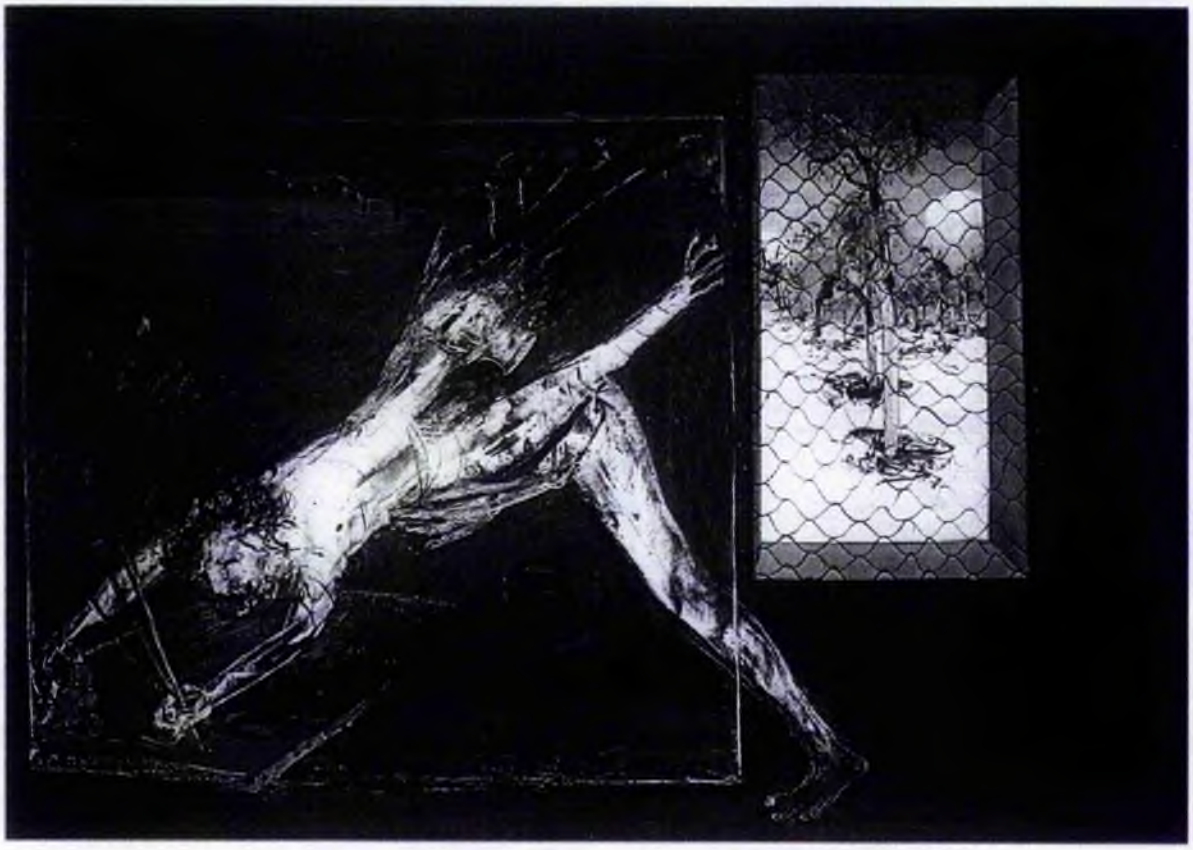
2.15 CAPE SCHANCK, 1939



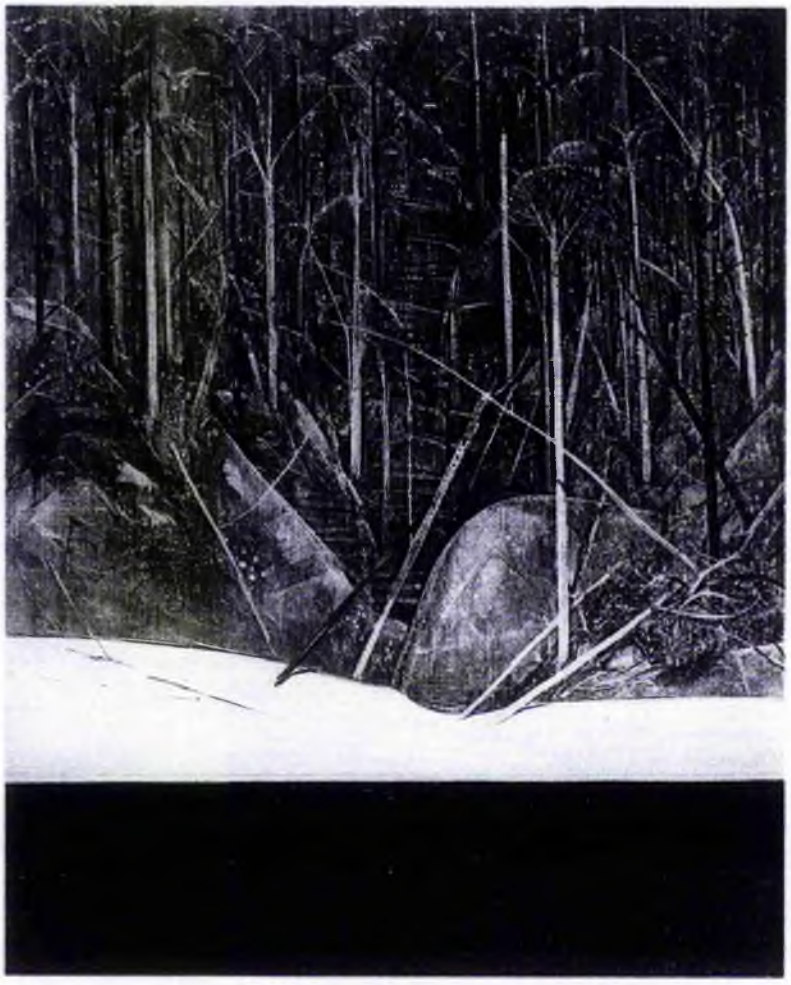
8.9 WOMAN INJECTING A RABBIT, 1973



8.10 RIVERBANK, 1972.



8.11 PAINTING IN THE STUDIO. FIGURE SUPPORTING BACK LEGS (OF PAINTER), 1972-3.



8.12 ROCKFACE AND RIVER AND SMALL WATERFALL, 1976.

8.13 AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE WITH POND, 1976 (copper)

8.14 BUDGONG CREEK ROCKS, 1978

8.15 WATERFALL AND ROCKFACE AT SHOALHAVEN VALLEY, 1975.

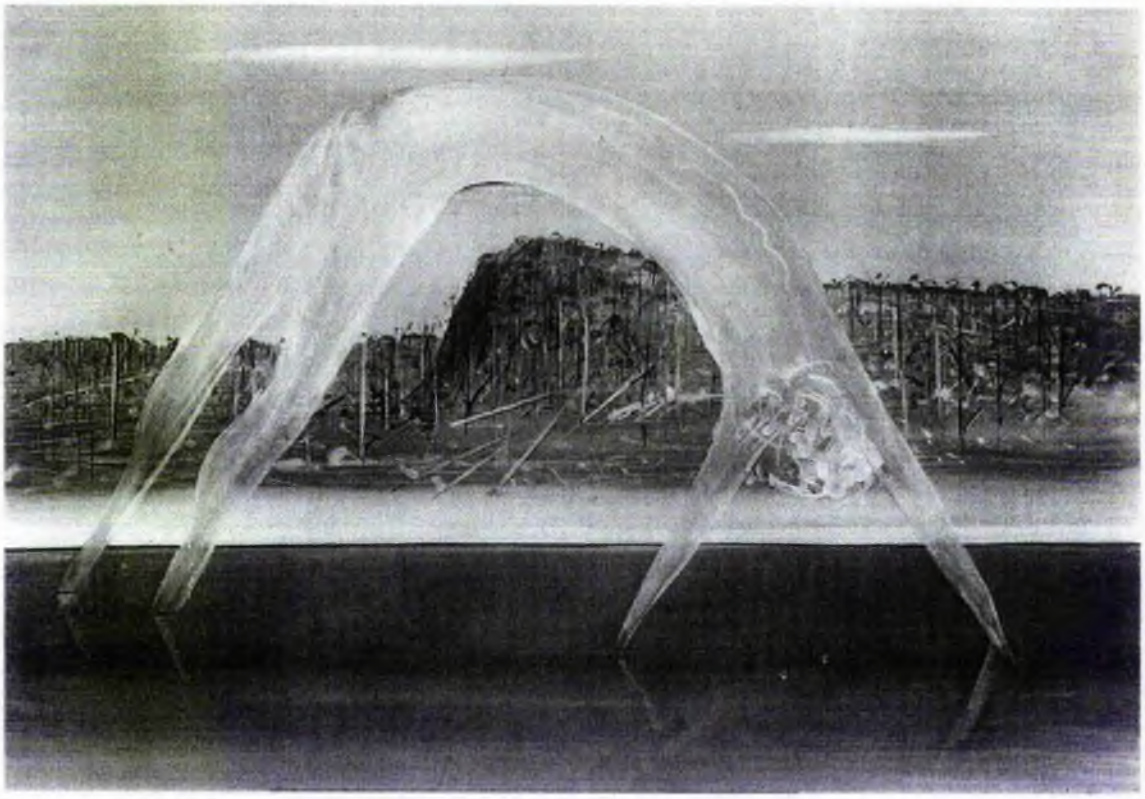
8.16 SHOALHAVEN RIVERBANK AND ROCKS. 1978.

8.17 FIGURE (ARTIST) IN A CAVE WITH A SMOKING BOOK, 1972-3

8.18 A POND FOR NARCISSUS WITH LILLY-PILLY TREES, 1978.

8.19 INTERIOR WITH OPEN DOOR. SHOALHAVEN. 1976

8.20 REFLECTED FIGURE AND CAVE.1976.

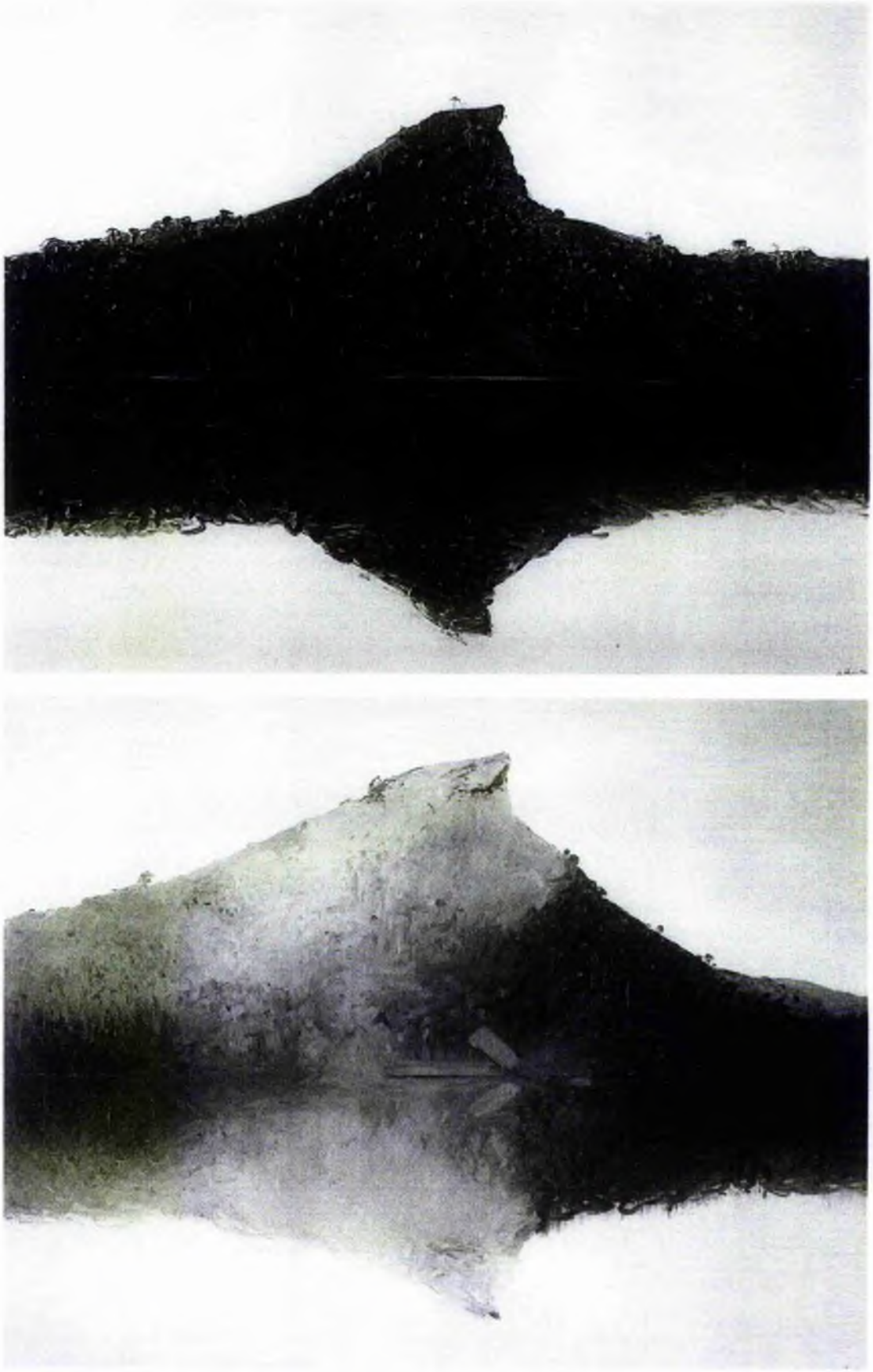


8.21 EYES REFLECTED (NARCISSUS), 1976.

8.22 HANGING ROCKS WITH MARS,, 1985

8.23 THE PRINCESS OF THE SHOALHAVEN, 1978.

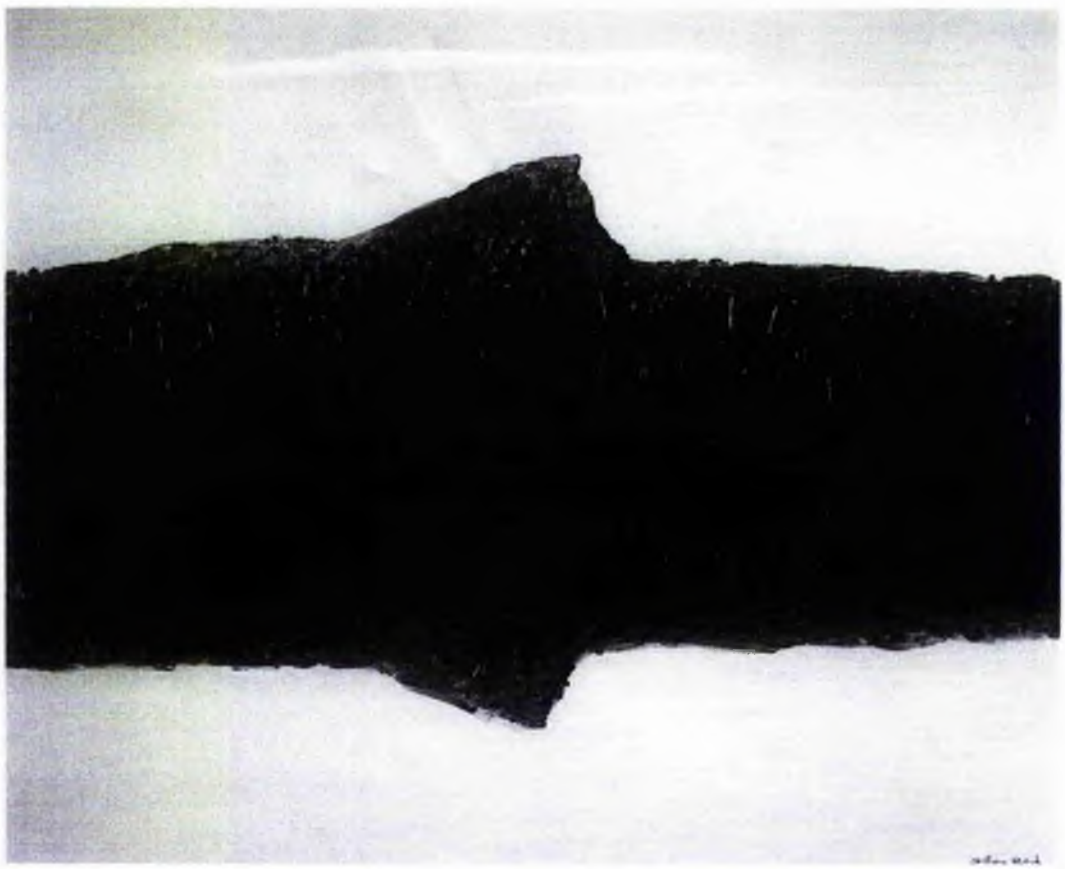
8.24 COLONIAL POET UNDER ORANGE - TREE, 1979-80.



FOUR TIMES OF DAY, 1982.

8.25 Early Morning, before Sunrise, Pulpit Rock.

8.26 Morning, Pulpit Rock.



8.27 FOUR TIMES OF DAY, 1982
Midday, Pulpit Rock.

8.28 Evening, Pulpit Rock.

8.29 REFLECTED ROCK AND RIVERBANK, Winter, 1981.

8.30 WATERFALL IN THE SHOALHAVEN VALLEY, 1982.

8.31 SKIER WITH ABORIGINAL POINTING, 1985

8.32 STORM CLOUD WITH BLACK SWAN, 1985

8.17 FIGURE (ARTIST) IN A CAVE WITH A SMOKING BOOK, 1972-3

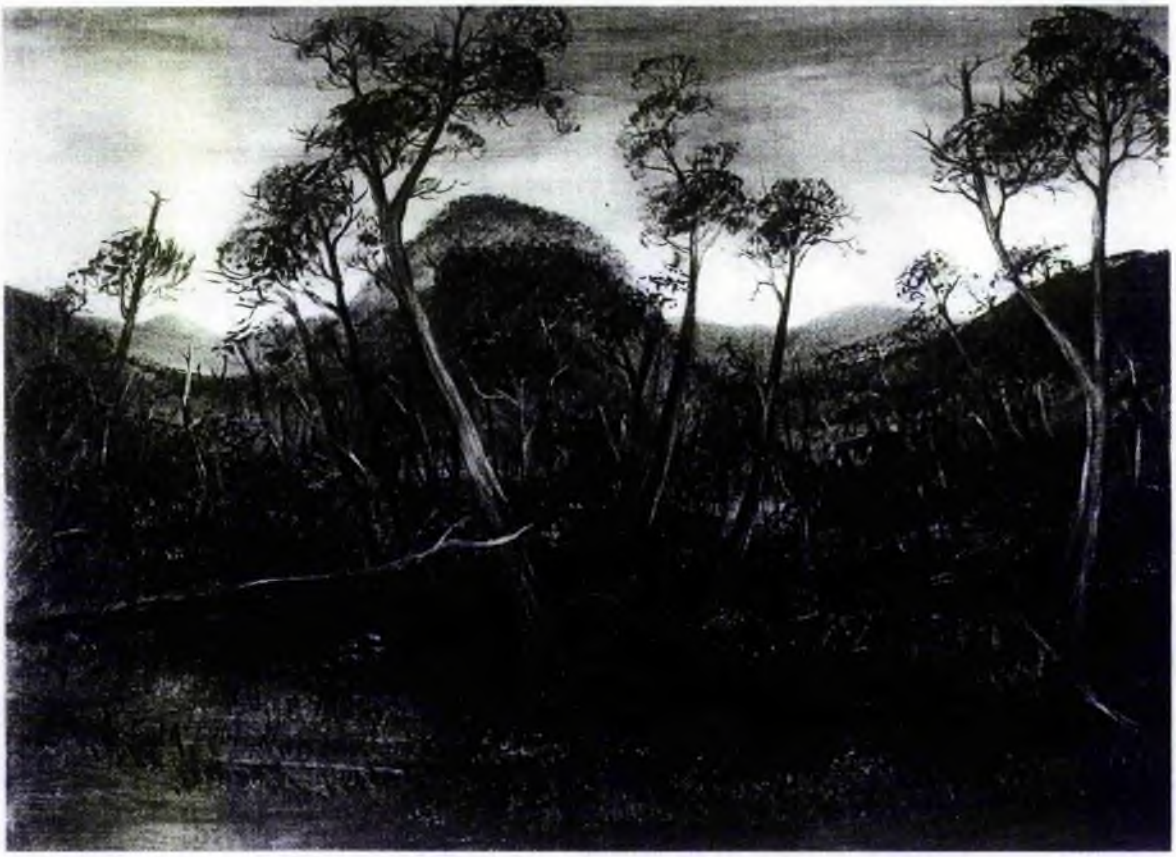
8.18 A POND FOR NARCISSUS WITH LILLY-PILLY TREES, 1978.

Landscape Transformed Through Painting

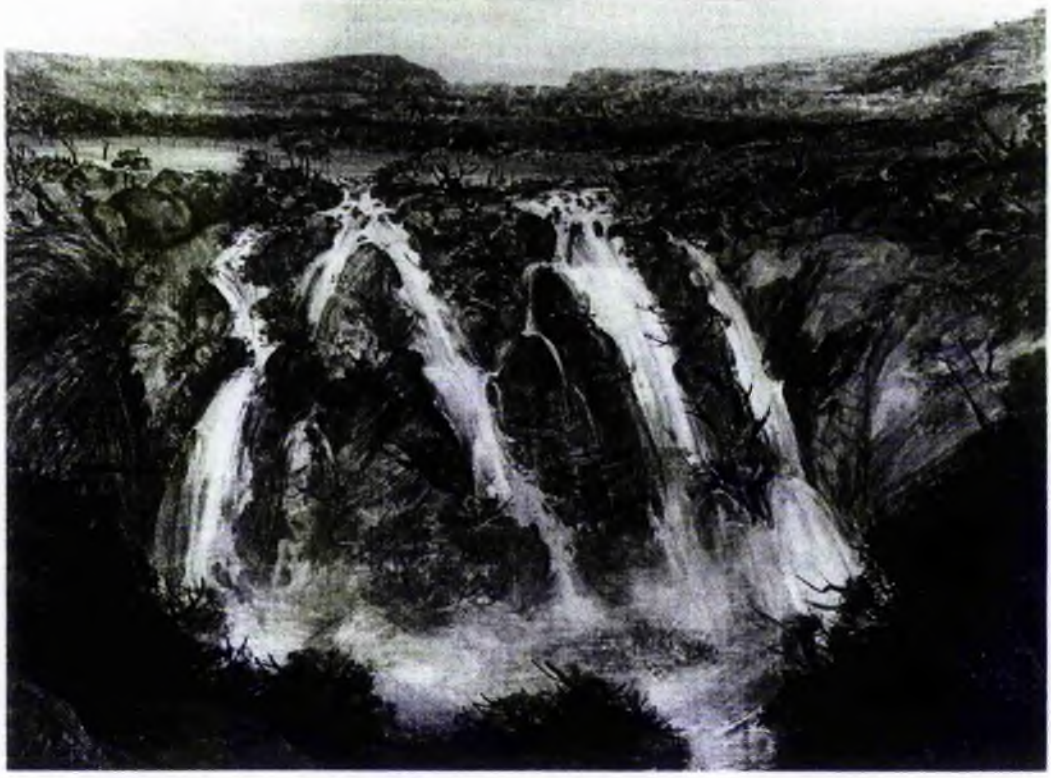
9.1 LANDSCAPE WITH GRAZING SHEEP, 1937

9.2 LANDSCAPE , BACCHUS MARSH, 1943

9.3 THE SHEPHERD (THE STOCKMAN), 1944



9.4 LANDSCAPE, GRAMPIANS, 1950-1.



9.5 GRAMPIANS WATERFALL, c.1950

9.6 THE HUNTER (ABORIGINAL HEAD ON A HORSE WITH SOLDIER), 1959

9.7 HALF-CASTE WEDDING, 1955

9.8 PERSECUTED LOVERS, 1957-8

9.9 LOVERS WITH A BLUEBIRD, 1962

9.10 FLOOD RECEDING IN WINTER EVENING, 1981

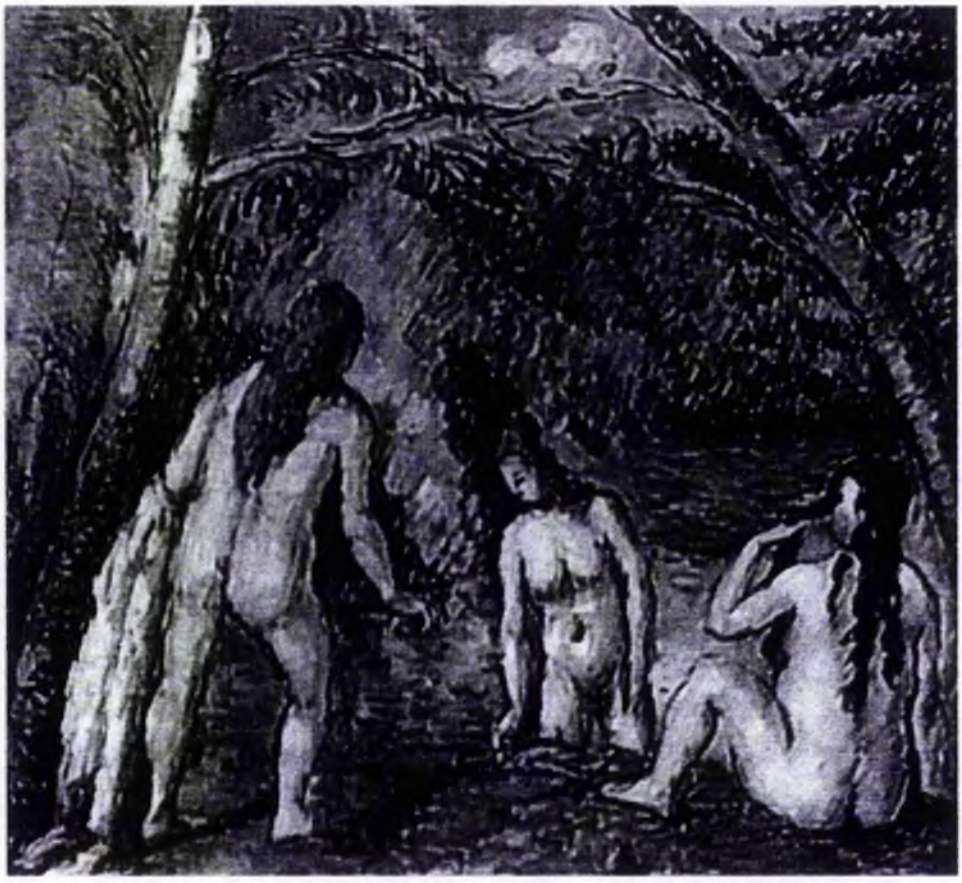
9.11 HORSE'S SKULL, BLANKET AND STARRY SKY, 1981.

9.12 FLAME TREES, HORSE'S SKULL, BLACK RIVER, 1983

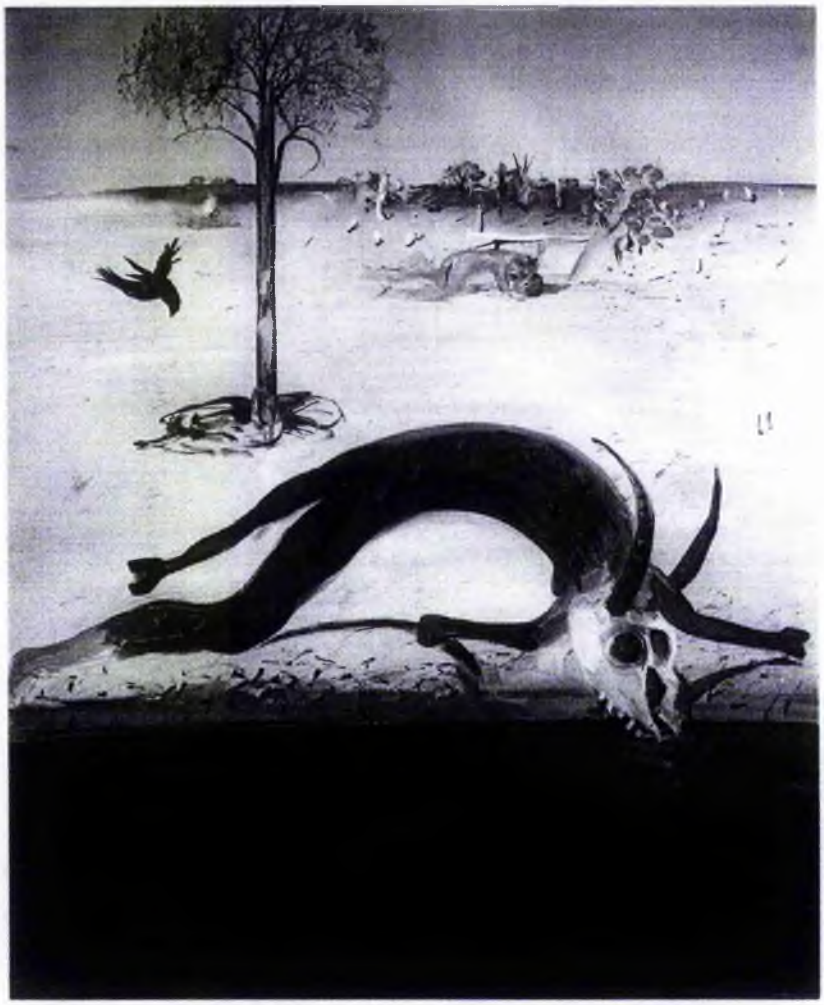
9.13 BATHERS SHOALHAVEN RIVERBANK AND CLOUDS, 1984-5

9.14 BATHERS AND PULPIT ROCK, 1984-5

9.15 BATHERS WITH SKATE AND HALLEY'S COMET, 1985



9.16 Paul Cezanne, BATHERS, c. 1879-82



9.17 SKULL - HEADED CREATURE OVER BLACK CREEK, 1979-80.

9.18 RIVERBANK WITH BATHERS AND MARS, 1985

9.19 THE AUSTRALIAN SCAPEGOAT, 1987

9.20 Detail from THE AUSTRALIAN SCAPEGOAT TRIPTYCH. 1988

9.21 LARGE SKATE ON GREY BACKGROUND, 1979-80.

9.22 THE AUSTRALIAN SCAPEGOAT. 1990

9.23 POTTER'S WIFE DECORATING A POT, 1967-9.

9.24 POTTER IN ARMCHAIR PAINTING A POT, c.1967.

9.25 Maquette for tapestry woven by the Victorian Tapestry Workshop in conjunction with the Parliament House Authority, Canberra 1984-5

9.29 SHEPHERD BY A BLACK CREEK, 1984-5

9.26 THE MAGIC FLUTE II, 1990

9.27 GREEN QUEEN OF THE NIGHT, 1990

9.28 BLACK POOL AND QUEEN OF THE NIGHT, 1990

Referential Works of Art

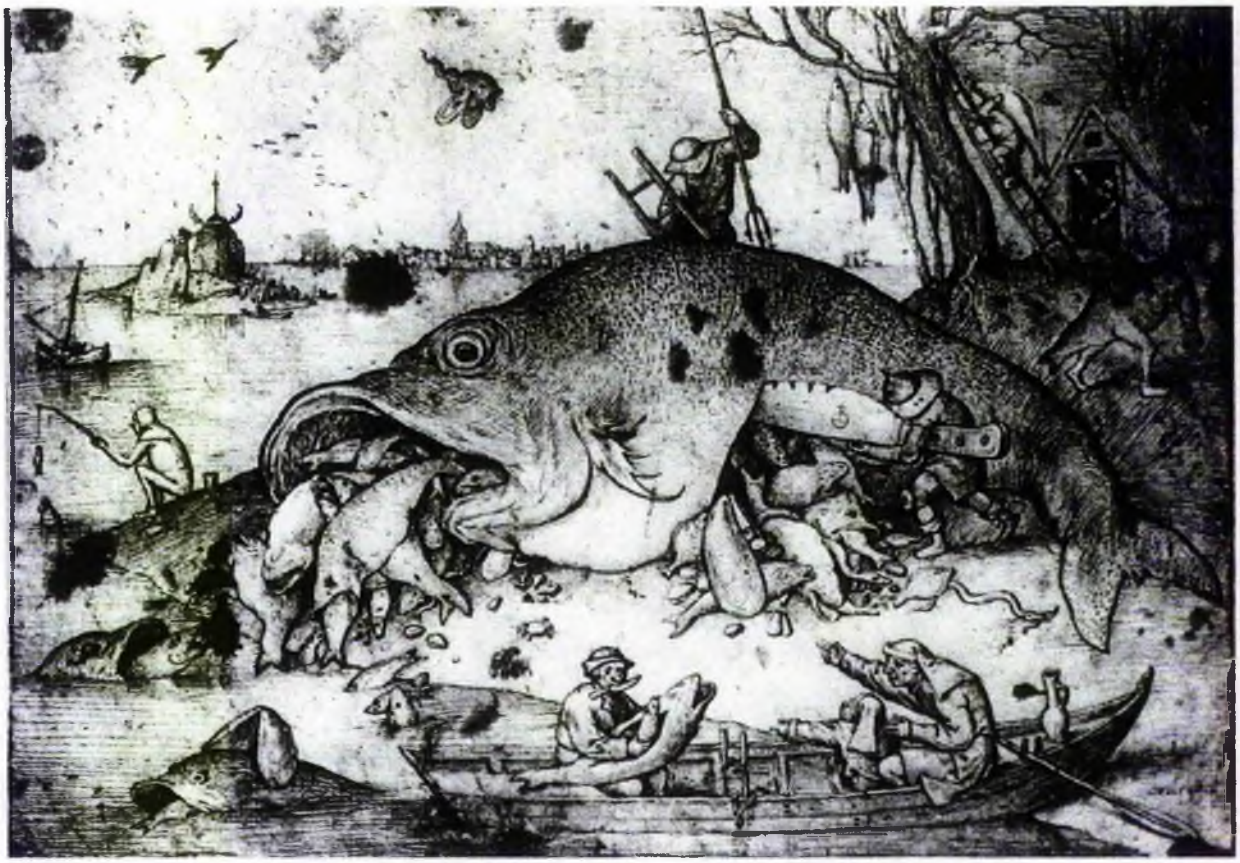
10.1 William Blake
THE STYGIAN LAKE - from illustrations to Dante's DIVINE COMEDY, 1824-7.

10.2 Arthur Merric Boyd (1862-1940),
LANDSCAPE, 1922.

10.3 Emma Minnie Boyd (1856-1936)
INTERIOR WITH FIGURES, THE GRANGE 1875

10.4 Penleigh Boyd, (1890- 1923)
WINTER TRIUMPHANT,1920.

10.5 Merric Boyd (1888-1959)
POT WITH LEANING TREE TRUNKS, 1912.

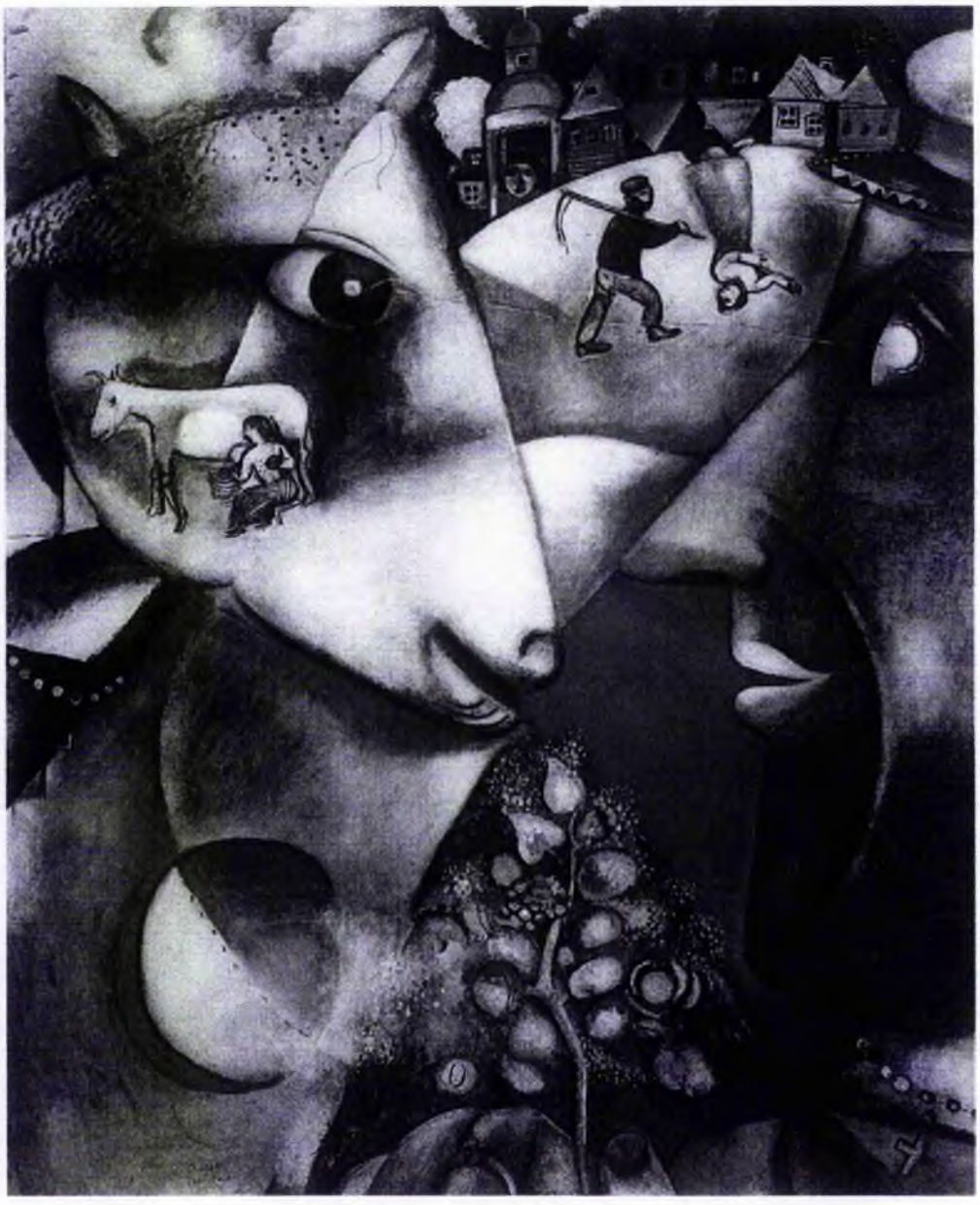


10.6 **BIG FISH EATS LITTLE FISH 1556**

10.7 Pieter Brueghel, **THE GLOOMY DAY, 1565**

10.8 THE LAND OF COCKAIGNE, 1567

10.9 THE CRIPPLES, 1568



10.10 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), I AND THE VILLAGE, 1911-1912

10.11 Marc Chagall, (1887-1985), OVER THE TOWN, c.1924.

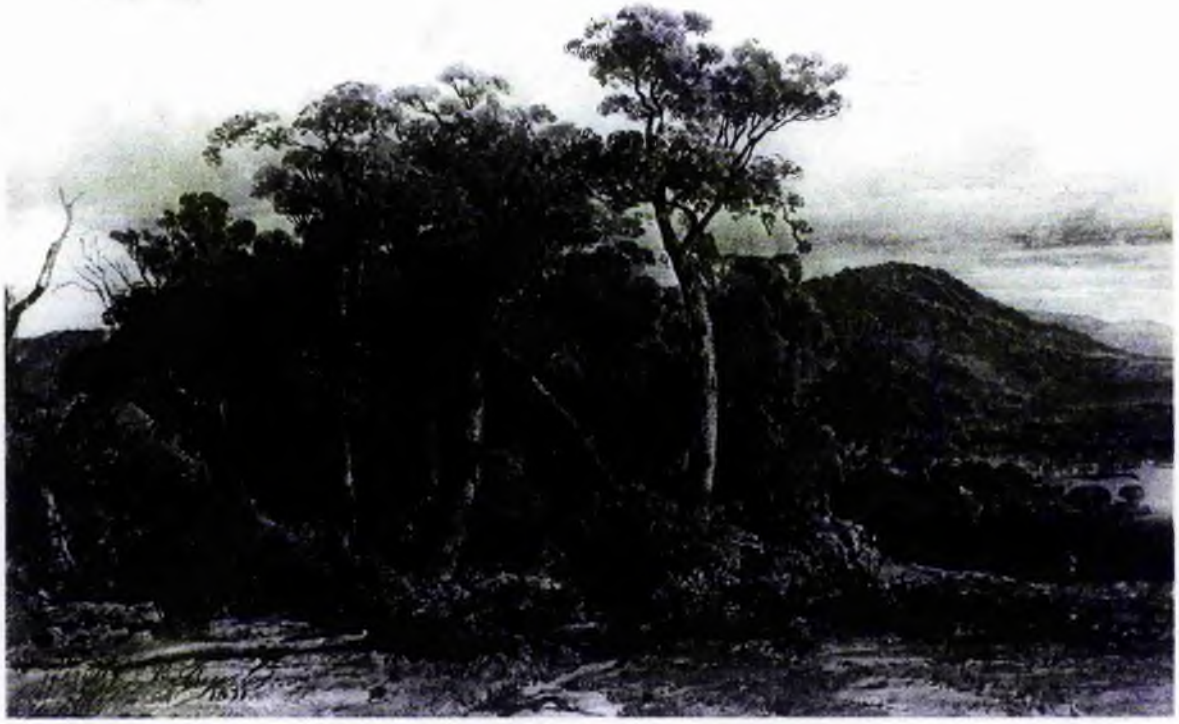
10.12 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), BOUQUET WITH FLYING LOVERS, 1934/1947

10.13 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), THE MARTYR, 1940

10.14 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), BLUE LANDSCAPE, 1949.

10.15 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), THE MADONNA AND THE VILLAGE, 1938-1944

10.16 Marc Chagall, (1887-1912), THE LIGHTS OF THE WEDDING,1945



10.20 Abram Louis Buvelot (1814-1888),
YARRA FLATS, 1871.

10.21 Piero di Cosimo (c.1462-after 1515),
A MYTHOLOGICAL SUBJECT.

10.22 **Rembrandt (1606-69)**
SELF-PORTRAIT, c. 1661.

10.23 Rembrandt (1606-69)
A WOMAN BATHING IN A STREAM, 1655.

10.24 Rembrandt (1606-69)
DAVID PLAYING THE HARP BEFORE SAUL.

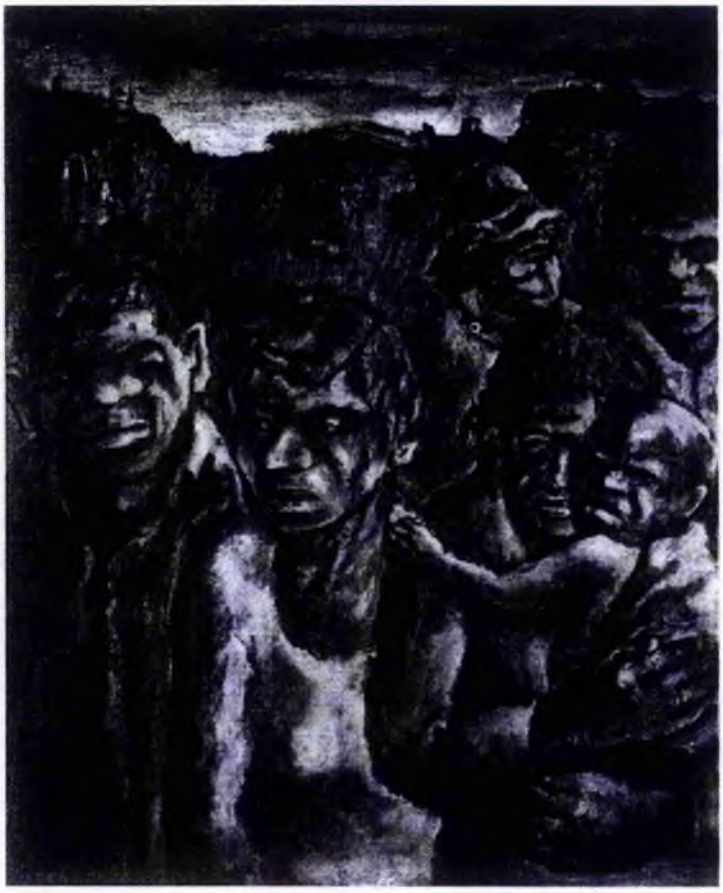
10.25 Rembrandt, (1606-69)
SUSANNAH SURPRISED BY THE ELDERS, 1637.

10.26 Titian, (Active before 1511, died 1576).
THE DEATH OF ACTAEON.

10.27 Eugen von Guerard, (1811-1901)
HEAD OF THE MITTA MITTA, EAGLE'S VIEW.

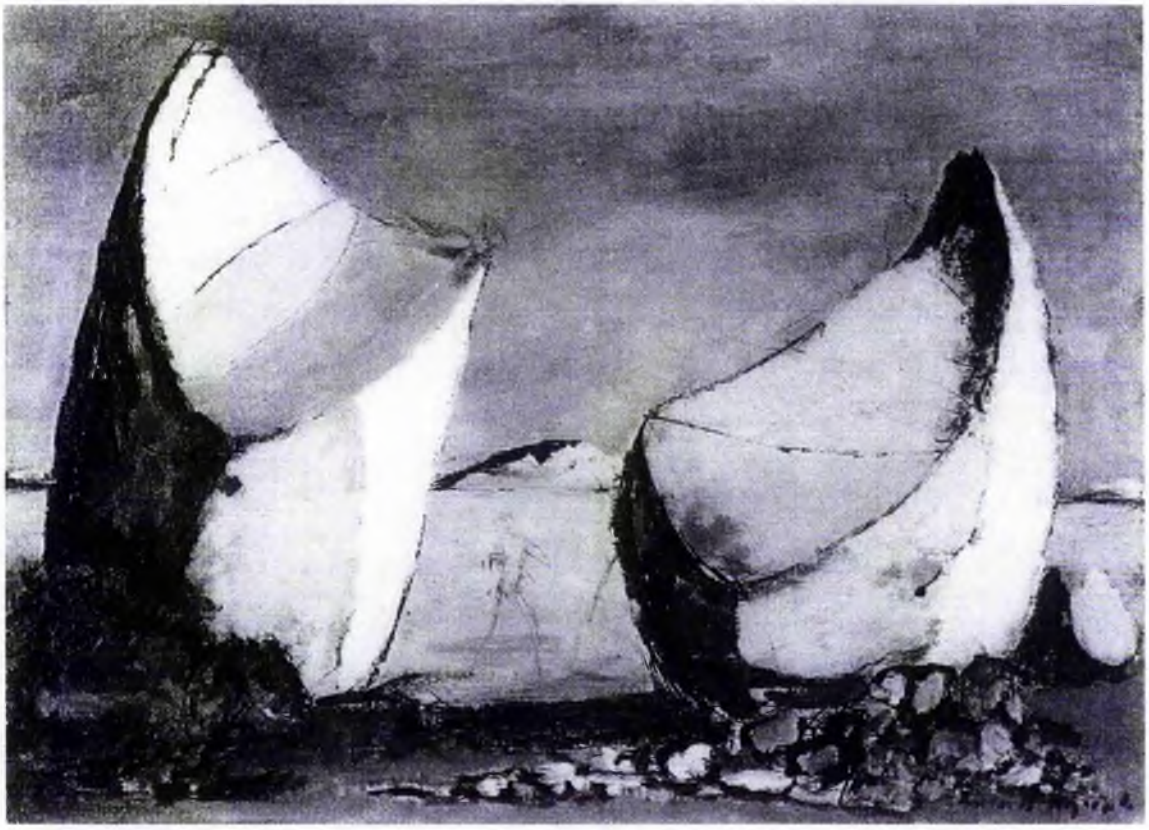
10.25 Noel Counihan, (1913-1986), ABORIGINAL MOTHER AND CHILD, 1960

10.26 Noel Counihan, (1913-1986), FAMILY, SWAN HILL,1960



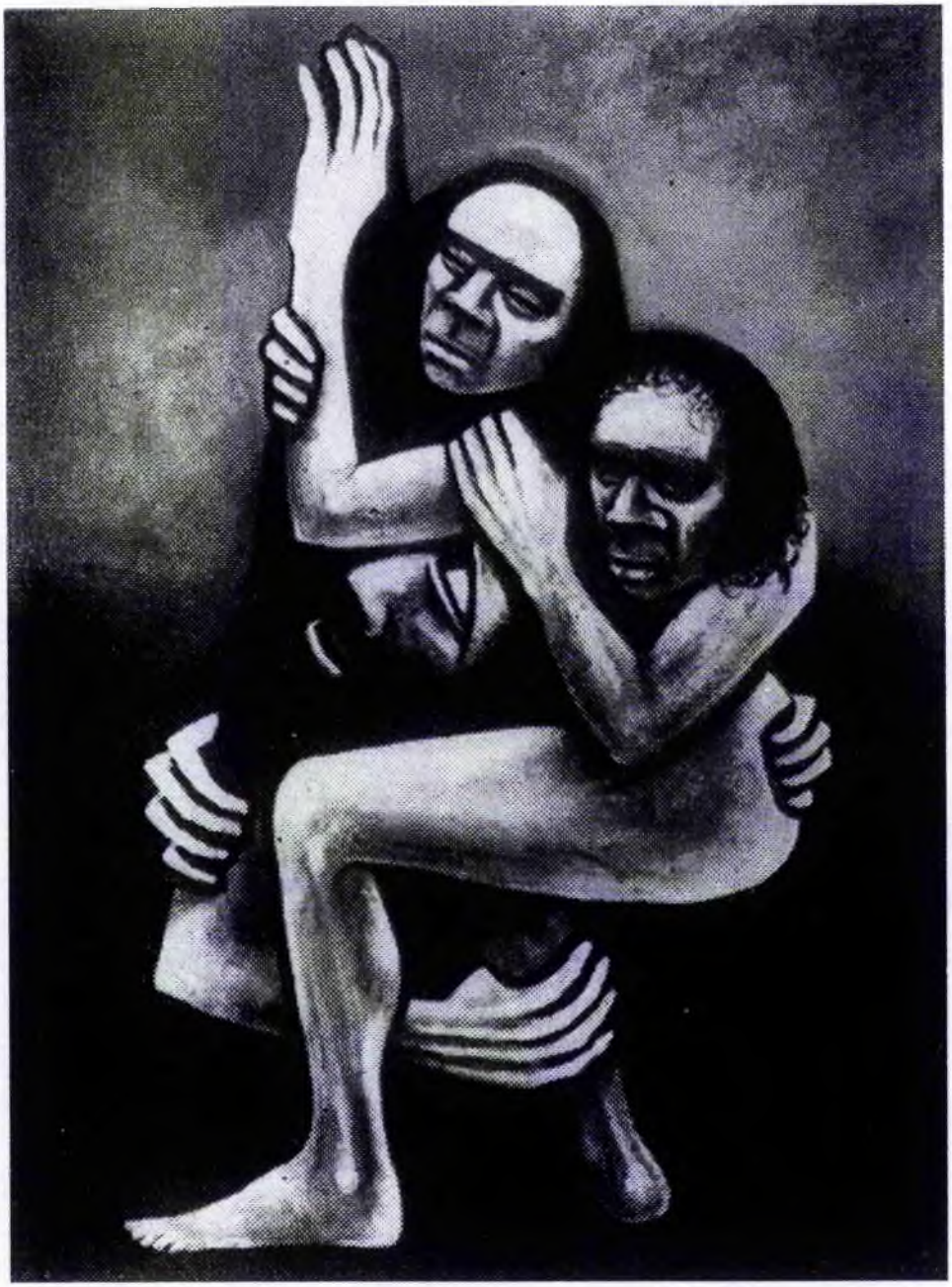
10.27 Yosl Bergner (1920-), ABORIGINES IN FITZROY, 1941

10.28 Russell Drysdale, (1912-1982), TWO HEADS OF LUBRAS, 1961.



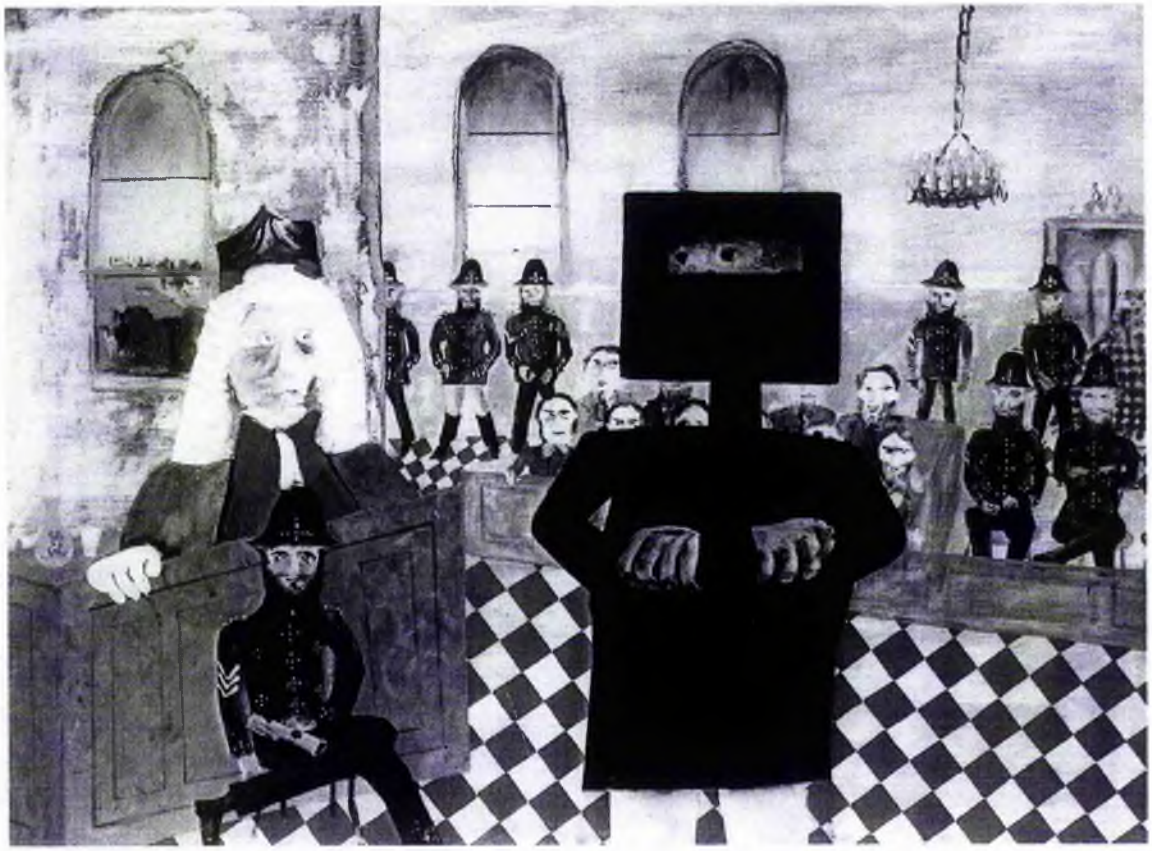
10.29 Russell Drysdale, (1912-1982), DESERT LANDSCAPE, c. 1952

10.30 David Boyd, (1924-), CONFLICT, 1959.



10.31 David Boyd, (1924-), TRUGANINI AND THE SEALER, 1959.

10.32 Sidney Nolan, (1917-1992) MUSGRAVE RANGES, 1949.



10.33 Sidney Nolan, (1917-1992), THE TRIAL, (Ned Kelly series), 1947.

10.34 Sidney Nolan, (1917-1992) BURKE AND WILLS EXPEDITION, GRAY SICK, 1949.